

# Public Attitudes Toward Secondary Education

The United States in an  
International Context



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# Public Attitudes Toward Secondary Education: The United States in an International Context

## Introduction

Students leaving school today—both in the United States and abroad—enter a workforce that is part of a global economy. For a country to compete successfully, the skills of its graduates must be on a par with those of graduates from any school system in the world. As policymakers and the education community strive to respond to these demands, the content of school curriculum, the overarching goals of the education system, and the role of practices at the school level have been ongoing concerns.

The views of the public in the United States and in 11 other countries in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)<sup>1</sup> about these concerns are the topic of this report. In many areas, results indicate that the opinions of Americans are similar to those of adults in other OECD countries, confirming our common concerns and recognizing areas in which we are working toward the same objectives. But in some areas, the views of Americans stand out, prompting us to consider whether areas of our education system are exemplary or whether we might benefit from what others could teach us.

The findings presented here represent responses to a public opinion survey conducted in 12 countries under the aegis of the OECD International Indicators of Education Systems (INES) project, which has been operating since 1987. In 1991, the INES project identified four work groups, called "Networks," to pursue work needed to develop indicators in new areas. One of those groups, Network D, was charged with developing indicators of the expectations and attitudes of various stakeholder groups toward education.<sup>2</sup> Network D decided to concentrate on the attitudes and expectations of the general public; and the participants realized quickly that there are common themes in major policy debates taking place in the countries of all Network participants. The curriculum, school autonomy, and the overall quality of the system were identified in all countries as broad areas of concern.

### Common policy concerns

With respect to curriculum, most countries with centralized school systems have begun to allow more regional and local input. At the same time, some policymakers in countries with decentralized systems—such as the United States—are seeking more national-level

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- 1 The OECD is made up of 26 developed countries. It promotes policies designed to foster economic growth and development throughout the world.*
  - 2 Topics assigned to the other Networks were cognitive outcomes of education, the labor market outcomes of education, and school features and processes.*

input, frequently through the mechanism of standards. In addition, many countries are modifying their curriculum to include new subjects such as environmental education and technology.

In the United States, increasing the decision making authority of schools has been a key aspect of recent restructuring reforms. During the past few years, many other countries have also been reexamining their organizational structures and implementing new arrangements that provide for increased decision making at the school level. Some of the areas in which schools are moving to greater autonomy include curriculum development, budgetary authority, personnel selection, and determination of class size.

Finally, concern about the quality of schools is at the top of the agenda in Network countries. As in the United States, this is reflected in many countries by the policy debate about standards and goals. In countries where traditionally quality control has been provided by national inspectorates, the functioning of these inspectorates is changing to include recognition of the role of parents and the public, and to require that schools demonstrate attainment of established goals.<sup>3</sup>

### **The survey of public expectations**

To learn more about the public's views in these common policy areas, a survey of adults was conducted in 1993 by twelve countries using a questionnaire jointly developed by the Network members. A translation procedure was established, and each country was responsible for following it when translating the English language questionnaire into its national language. Each country was also responsible for selecting the sample and administering the survey.

Guidelines for each stage of the process were provided by the Network, and the work was monitored by Network staff in the Scottish Office Education Department, headquarters of Network D. Most countries used either address-based or population register-based probability samples; the United States used a telephone-based probability sample; and three of the twelve countries used address-based nonprobability (quota) samples.<sup>4,5</sup> The sampling resulted in effective sample sizes ranging from 800 to 1,700.

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3 For more information about policy concerns in countries, see *The Policy Context: A Summary* (in *Public Expectations of the Final Stage of Compulsory Education*, OECD, 1995) and *Recent Developments in the Education Systems of Twelve OECD Countries* (in *Public Expectations of the Final Stage of Compulsory Education: Technical Report*, Network D, *The Scottish Office, Education Department*, 1995).

4 These three countries were France, Spain, and Switzerland. A list of which countries used which type of sample can be found in Table 6.1, p. 36, *Public Expectations of the Final Stage of Compulsory Education*, *Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development*, 1995.

5 In this publication, these address-based nonprobability samples are treated like simple random samples for the purpose of calculating standard errors. Although quota methods are likely to produce samples that are biased on characteristics such as income, education, and occupation, they often agree well with probability samples on questions of opinion and attitude. (See Cochran, W.G. (1977). *Sampling Techniques*. New York: John Wiley, p. 136.)

For the nine countries that used probability samples, there is the possibility of response bias. The extent of this bias was checked by comparing how the sample performed against the population as a whole on key background variables. Where samples were not representative, a mixture of measures was used to develop sample weights to optimize the representativeness of these samples.<sup>6</sup> By definition, quota samples are representative for the variables used to define the quota.

### **This report**

In this report, survey results from the United States are compared with results from the eleven other countries that participated in the survey: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Comparisons are presented for questions on six topics:

- 1 the importance of subjects taught in schools;
- 2 the importance of schools developing certain personal and social qualities or aptitudes in students;
- 3 confidence that the subjects are taught well;
- 4 confidence that schools have a major effect on the development of personal and social qualities;
- 5 the important practices to emphasize in order for schools to achieve their goals; and
- 6 the importance of decision making at the school level.

For each topic, a sample of the public in each country was presented with a list of items and asked to rate each of them using either a five-point scale from "essential" to "not at all important" (for topics dealing with the importance of subjects, personal and social qualities, and school practices) or a four-point scale from "very confident" to "not at all confident" (for confidence in the teaching of subjects and schools' development of personal and social qualities in students). The topic dealing with the importance of school-level decision making used a four-point scale from "very important" to "not at all important." Each topic contained an additional response category indicating "not sure either way."

T-tests of the significance of the differences between each country's mean response on each of the six items and the United States were performed. Differences discussed in this publication are significant at the 0.05 level with Bonferroni adjustment. The next section presents the key findings. This is followed by a section that presents more detailed findings of each of the survey topics.

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6 Details of the checks each country performed and any subsequent reweighting undertaken as a result of these checks can be found in Table 6.2, p. 37, *Public Expectations of the Final Stage of Compulsory Education, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 1995.*

## Key Findings

Perhaps because school systems in OECD countries are grappling with broadly the same social issues, survey results showed many similarities in the public's attitudes in the countries. For example, the public in most countries regarded native language, foreign languages, and mathematics as the most important subjects. The public also held similar expectations regarding the importance of the schools' role in the development of students' personal and social qualities. On occasion, there were also some notable differences among countries. Therefore, in addition to discussing the many similarities among countries, this section points out the most striking differences between the U.S. public and the public in other countries. How the similarities and differences relate to the United States' national goals for education is discussed.

### **Importance of subjects**

Relative to the other OECD countries, *native* language in the United States is among the highest rated subjects, whereas *foreign* language is among the lowest (table 1). This low rating for foreign languages is currently at odds with Goal 3 of the National Education Goals, which deals with student achievement and citizenship. One of the objectives of this goal states, "The percentage of all students who are competent in more than one language will substantially increase."<sup>7</sup> Although about one-half of the U.S. public rated foreign language instruction as "essential" or "very important," seven of the nine other subjects, including subjects such as physical education and education for citizenship, are viewed by the U.S. public as more important than foreign languages.

Along with native and foreign languages, mathematics is considered one of the most important subjects in most countries. In the United States, mathematics and native language were rated "essential" or "very important" by more of the public than any other subject. Moreover, the public in the United States rated the importance of mathematics higher than the public in any other country. This finding is in keeping with Goal 5 of the National Education Goals, which states, "By the year 2000, United States students will be first in the world in mathematics and science achievement."<sup>8</sup>

Also consistent with Goal 5, the United States' public rated the importance of sciences (as a subject that students should study) considerably higher than the public in other countries. Information technology is another important subject in the United States, with about 85 percent of the public rating it as either "essential" or "very important." In no other country did the public consider information technology as important as the public in the United States.

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7 *National Education Goals Panel (1994)*. National Education Goals Report. Washington, DC: Author, p. 9.

8 *National Education Goals Panel (1994)*. National Education Goals Report. Washington, DC: Author, p. 10.

### **Importance of schools developing certain personal and social qualities or aptitudes in students**

Three personal and social qualities were considered "essential" or "very important" for schools to develop in students by 70 percent or more of the public in all countries (figure 7). These were the skills and knowledge necessary to get a job; self-confidence; and the ability to live among people from different backgrounds. Self-confidence was rated "essential" or "very important" by 85 percent or more of the public in ten countries.

Eighty-five percent or more of the public in the United States considered it important for schools to provide students with the skills and knowledge necessary to get a job, as well as the skills and knowledge necessary to continue studying and training. In addition, 85 percent or more of the United States' public rated the following as either "essential" or "very important": self-confidence; the desire to continue studying and training; and being a good citizen. Being a good citizen and the desire to continue studying and training were each rated as "essential" or "very important" by 85 percent or more of the public in only one country other than the United States.

All eight personal and social qualities were rated higher in importance by the public in the United States than foreign languages, the arts, and technical studies. In several other countries, the schools' role in developing seven of the eight personal and social qualities was considered more important than several subjects schools teach, including the sciences, social subjects, education for citizenship, physical education, the arts, and technical studies.

### **Confidence that subjects are taught well and that schools have a major effect on the development of personal and social qualities**

Although the public in the United States views three academic subjects as most important (mathematics, native language, and information technology), 70 percent or less of the public in the United States has confidence that those subjects are being well taught (table 3). The U.S. response contrasts with 85 percent or more of the public in three countries who do have confidence that mathematics is being well taught and over 85 percent of the public in one country that has confidence that the native language is being well taught (figure 12). The public in a majority of the other countries has more confidence than the public in the United States in the teaching of sciences and foreign languages (figures 15 and 16). However, across countries the percentage of the public that is confident that important subjects are taught well is considerably lower than the percentage that views these subjects as "essential" or "very important."

Relative to the importance the public attaches to the development of personal and social qualities, and the public's confidence in how well subjects are being taught, the public's confidence in the schools' role in the development of students' personal and social qualities is low in almost all countries (table 4). In the United States, 70 percent or less of the public had confidence in the schools' role in the development of any of the eight personal and social qualities on the survey.

### **Important practices to emphasize in order for schools to achieve their goals**

Keeping parents well informed and involved along with helping those with learning difficulties were school practices considered priorities by 70 percent or more of the public in all countries (figure 22). In the United States, one of the top priorities was keeping parents well informed and involved, with about 95 percent of the public giving this practice a rating of either "essential" or "very important." Maintaining discipline and providing careers advice and guidance were also considered important by the public in most countries. Among all countries, a wide range of subjects taught and the assignment of regular homework were considered the least important school practices.

The public in the United States also considered strong leadership from the school principal more important than did the public in most other countries (about 85 percent of the U.S. public gave it a rating of either "essential" or "very important"). A similar level of importance was attached to leadership from the school principal (head master) by the public in France (over 80 percent).

### **Importance of decision making at the school level**

Compared to other countries, the public in the United States was much more supportive of school-level decision making (figure 28). For example, the U.S. public rated the following four decisions higher than the public in any other country: teacher selection and promotion, how the school budget is spent, teachers' salaries and working conditions, and what subjects are taught (table 6). In six countries (Belgium, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the United Kingdom), decision making at the school level in the following three areas—teacher selection and promotion, spending of the school budget, and the way in which subjects are taught—was regarded as more important than school-level decision making regarding teachers' salaries and working conditions, the amount of time spent teaching each subject, and what subjects are taught. The public in all countries considered it relatively more important for schools to make decisions about how subjects are taught than decisions regarding what subjects are taught.

## Results

The results presented in each of the following six sections expand on the key findings.

### Importance of subjects

What is being taught in schools today is undergoing substantial scrutiny in many countries.<sup>9</sup> Largely as a result of public dissatisfaction with educational outcomes, many countries are moving toward more challenging curricula. In countries where the school curriculum is conceived at the national level, several are revising their curricula, often with minimum and maximum amounts of time being specified for core-curriculum subjects. In other countries that do not have a national curriculum, interest is growing in the development of standards that express what students should learn.<sup>10</sup> In all countries, there are concerns about whether the school curriculum is keeping pace with a fast-changing world.<sup>11</sup> In addition, new approaches to subjects based on the accomplishment of minimum goals, acquisition of basic competencies, and attainment targets are increasingly replacing the traditional approach based on knowledge of different subjects.

Considerable public debate has arisen in many OECD countries because of the changes that are taking place in what schools are teaching. Some concerns involve the emphasis on specific subjects, in particular the range of subjects and the relative importance of different subjects. Other concerns focus more on the goals of education, with the traditional approach of transmitting knowledge contrasted with the need to prepare students for work and to develop their personal and social skills. The following findings from the survey provide information about how the public in different countries regard the importance of a range of subjects.

1. Native language, foreign languages, and mathematics were viewed as important subjects in all countries. With one or two exceptions in each case, 70 percent or more of the public in each country rated these subjects as either essential or very important (figure 1). In nine countries, 85 percent or more of the public considered the teaching of native language as either essential or very important. For both mathematics and foreign languages, this level of support was found in six countries. Technical studies and the arts were rated as the subjects of least importance across countries. Less than 70 percent of the public in all countries rated these subjects as essential or very important.

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9. Center for Educational Research Innovation, *Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (1990). Curriculum Reform: An Overview of Trends, Paris: Author.*

10. *Most of the OECD countries covered by this report have a national curriculum to some degree. However, three countries have no national curriculum—Finland, Switzerland, and the United States. (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (1995). Public Expectations of the Final Stage of Compulsory Education. Paris: Author, Appendix 10.)*

11. *Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (1995). Public Expectations of the Final Stage of Compulsory Education. Paris: Author, p. 31 and p. 49.*

- I Mathematics was ranked higher by the U.S. public than by the public in any other country (figure 2). About 96 percent of the public in the United States gave mathematics a rating of either essential or very important. The same responses in other countries ranged from about 91 percent (Austria, Sweden, and the United Kingdom) to about 69 percent (the Netherlands).
- I The sciences were rated important by a higher percentage of the U.S. public compared with the public in any other country (figure 3). About 84 percent of public in the United States rated the sciences essential or very important compared with ratings in other countries that ranged from about 75 percent (Portugal) to about 46 percent (Denmark).
- I Native language was considered essential or very important by 70 percent or more of the public in all countries except Spain (figure 4). In Spain, about 67 percent of the public rated the teaching of native language essential or very important.
- I Instruction in foreign languages was rated essential or very important by about 85 percent of the public in six countries and by over about 70 percent of the public in all countries except in the United States (53 percent) and the United Kingdom (55 percent) (figure 5).
- I The public in almost all countries drew a sharp distinction between the importance of information technology and technical studies (figure 6). Information technology (e.g., computing and database management) was viewed as relatively more important than technical studies (e.g., metal shop and drafting) in all countries except Spain, where they were viewed as nearly the same.

Table 1.—Educational importance/priorities in each country<sup>1</sup> (The percentage of the public in each country who gave the subject listed a rating of either “essential” or “very important.”)

<b>Subject</b>	United States	Austria	Belgium	Denmark	Finland	France	Netherlands	Portugal	Spain	Sweden	Switzerland	United Kingdom	Subject average
Mathematics	96	91	80	81	84	88	69	85	72	91	82	91	<b>84</b>
English/Native Language	92	91	86	85	77	97	90	90	67	93	84	86	<b>87</b>
Information Technology	86	78	77	55	69	69	75	74	65	63	71	71	<b>71</b>
The Sciences	84	67	57	46	52	63	64	75	65	64	63	65	<b>64</b>
Social Subjects	80	71	44	41	48	69	47	74	66	58	62	49	<b>59</b>
Education for Citizenship	77	64	66	46	34	67	41	72	66	69	65	36	<b>59</b>
Physical Education	62	73	63	38	61	50	41	69	52	54	67	40	<b>56</b>
Foreign Languages	53	90	88	79	87	87	85	84	71	87	77	55	<b>79</b>
The Arts	47	42	29	36	30	31	31	54	44	31	58	25	<b>38</b>
Technical Studies	36	60	53	—	38	47	42	65	63	37	52	56	<b>50</b>
<b>Country Average</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>57</b>	

<sup>1</sup>Subjects are listed according to the priorities of the U.S. public.

—The importance of the subject “Technical Studies” was not asked for in Denmark.

SOURCE: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Education at a Glance, 1995*.

Figure 1.—Educational importance/priorities in each country<sup>1</sup>

Subject	United States	Austria	Belgium	Denmark	Finland	France	Netherlands	Portugal	Spain	Sweden	Switzerland	United Kingdom
Mathematics	P	P	I	I	I	P	P	P	I	P	I	P
English/Native Language	P	P	P	P	I	P	P	P	i	P	I	P
Information Technology	P	I	I	i	i	i	I	I	i	i	I	I
The Sciences	I	i	i	i	i	i	i	I	i	i	i	i
Social Subjects	I	I	i	i	i	i	i	I	i	i	i	i
Education for Citizenship	I	i	i	i	i	i	i	I	i	i	i	i
Physical Education	i	I	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i
Foreign Languages	i	P	P	I	P	P	P	i	I	P	I	i
The Arts	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i
Technical Studies	i	i	i	—	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i

<sup>1</sup>Subjects are listed according to the priorities of the U.S. public.

—The importance of the subject "Technical Studies" was not asked for in Denmark.

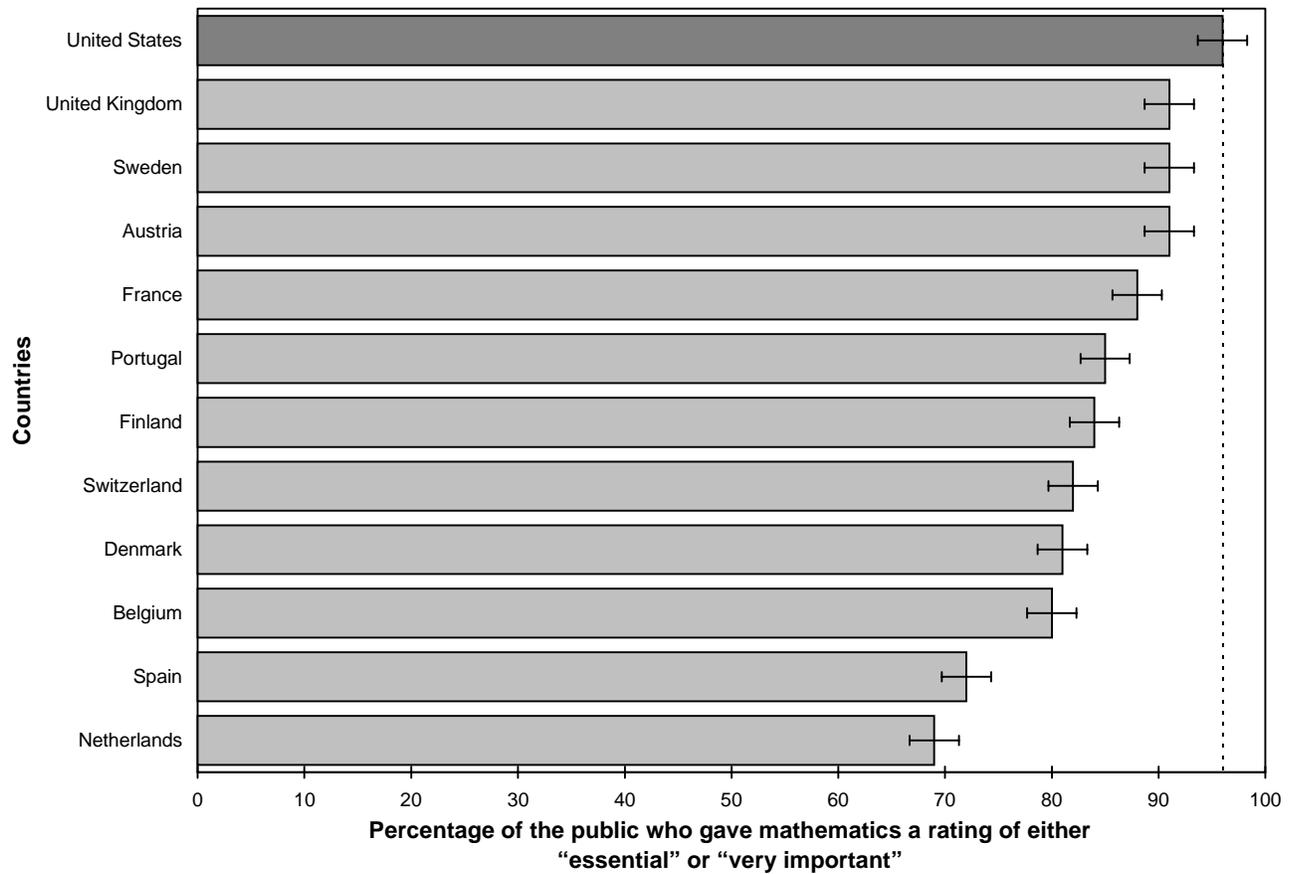
P Indicates that 85 percent or more of the public in this country gave the subject listed a rating of either "essential" or "very important."

I Indicates that 70 to 84 percent of the public in this country gave the subject listed a rating of either "essential" or "very important."

i Indicates that less than 70 percent of the public in this country gave the subject listed a rating of either "essential" or "very important."

SOURCE: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Education at a Glance*, 1995.

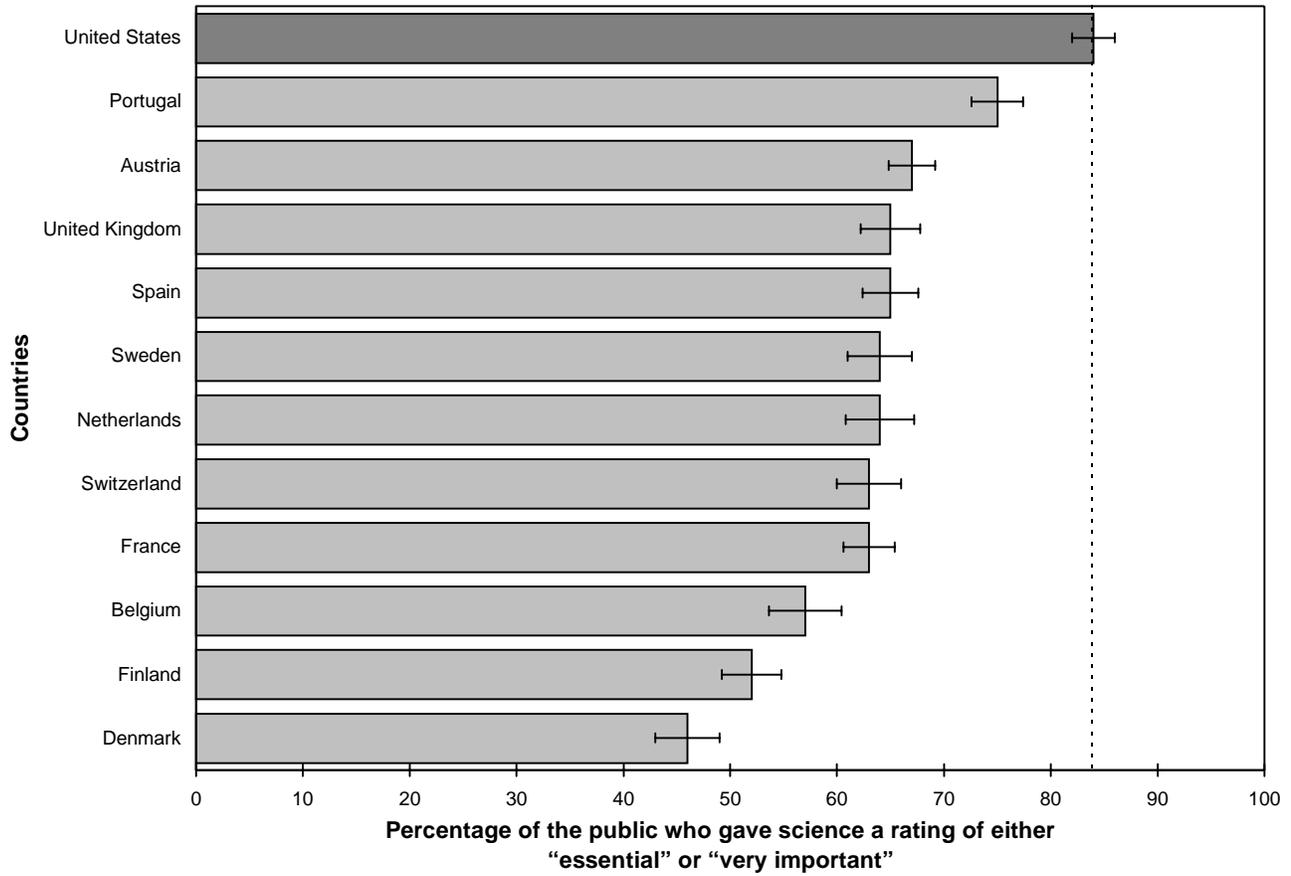
Figure 2.—Mathematics as an educational priority



*(The dotted line shows the percentage of the U.S. public who gave mathematics a rating of either "essential" or "very important." The whisker plots show the 95 percent confidence interval.)*

*SOURCE: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Education at a Glance, 1995.*

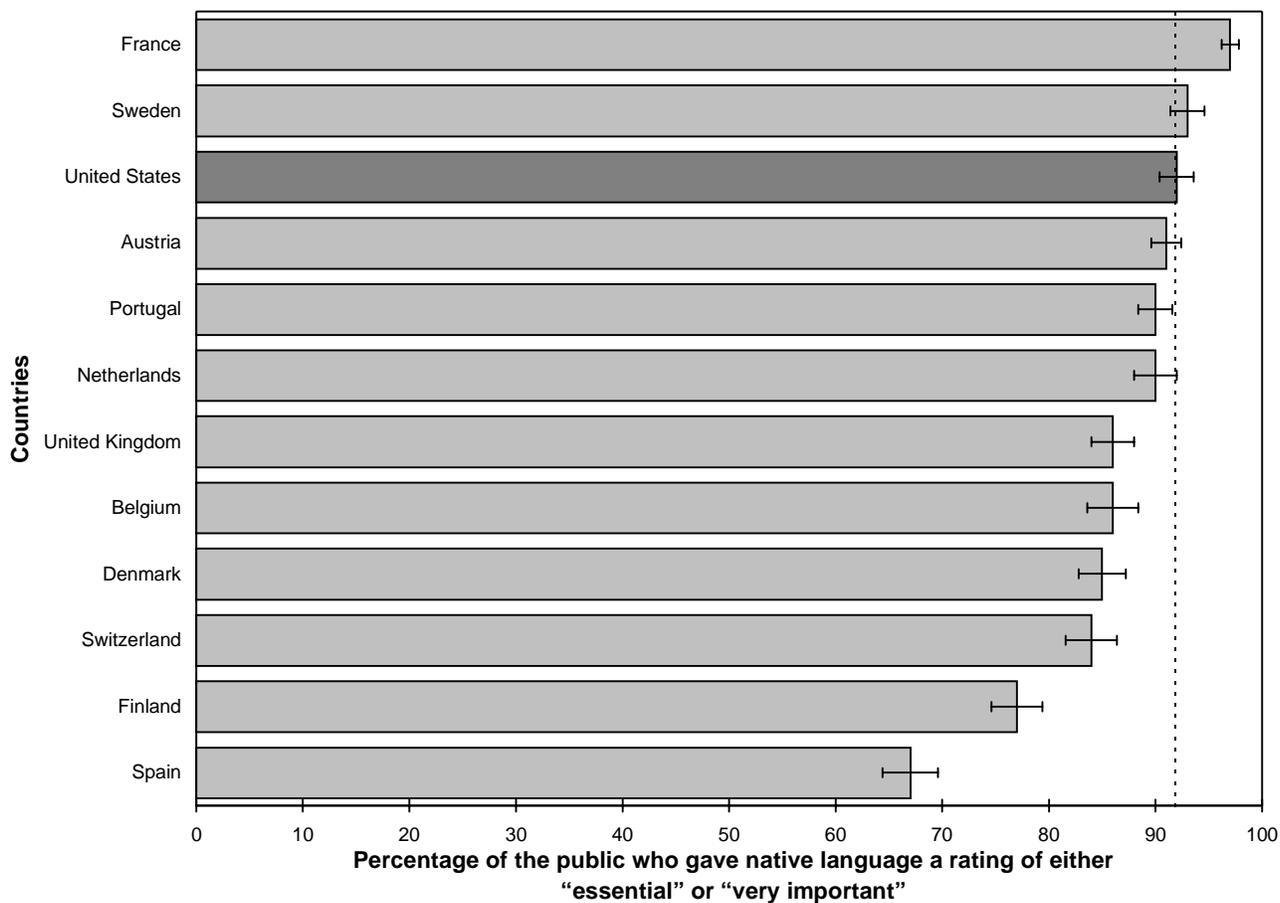
Figure 3.—Science as an educational priority



*(The dotted line shows the percentage of the U.S. public who gave science a rating of either "essential" or "very important." The whisker plots show the 95 percent confidence interval.)*

*SOURCE: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Education at a Glance, 1995.*

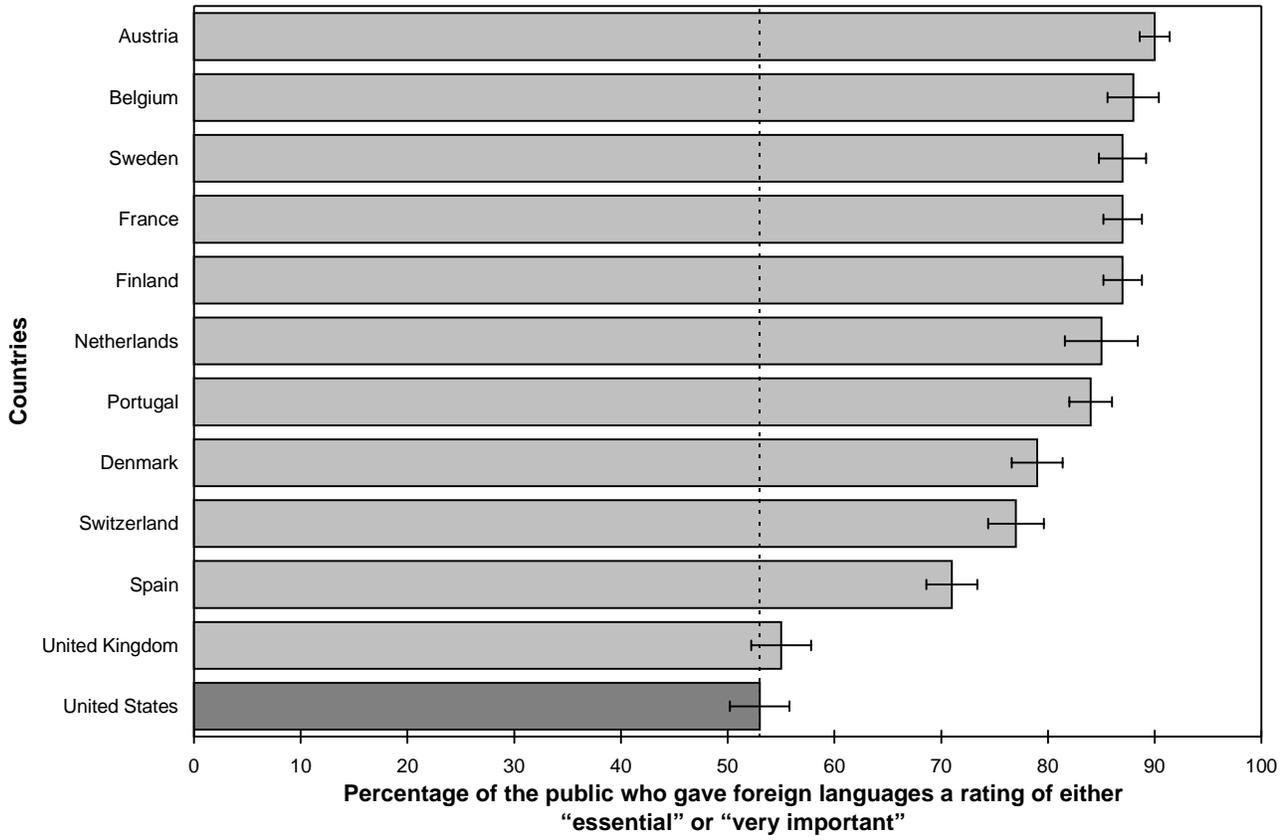
Figure 4.—Native language as an educational priority



(The dotted line shows the percent of the U.S. public who gave native language a rating of either "essential" or "very important." The whisker plots show the 95 percent confidence interval.)

SOURCE: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Education at a Glance, 1995.

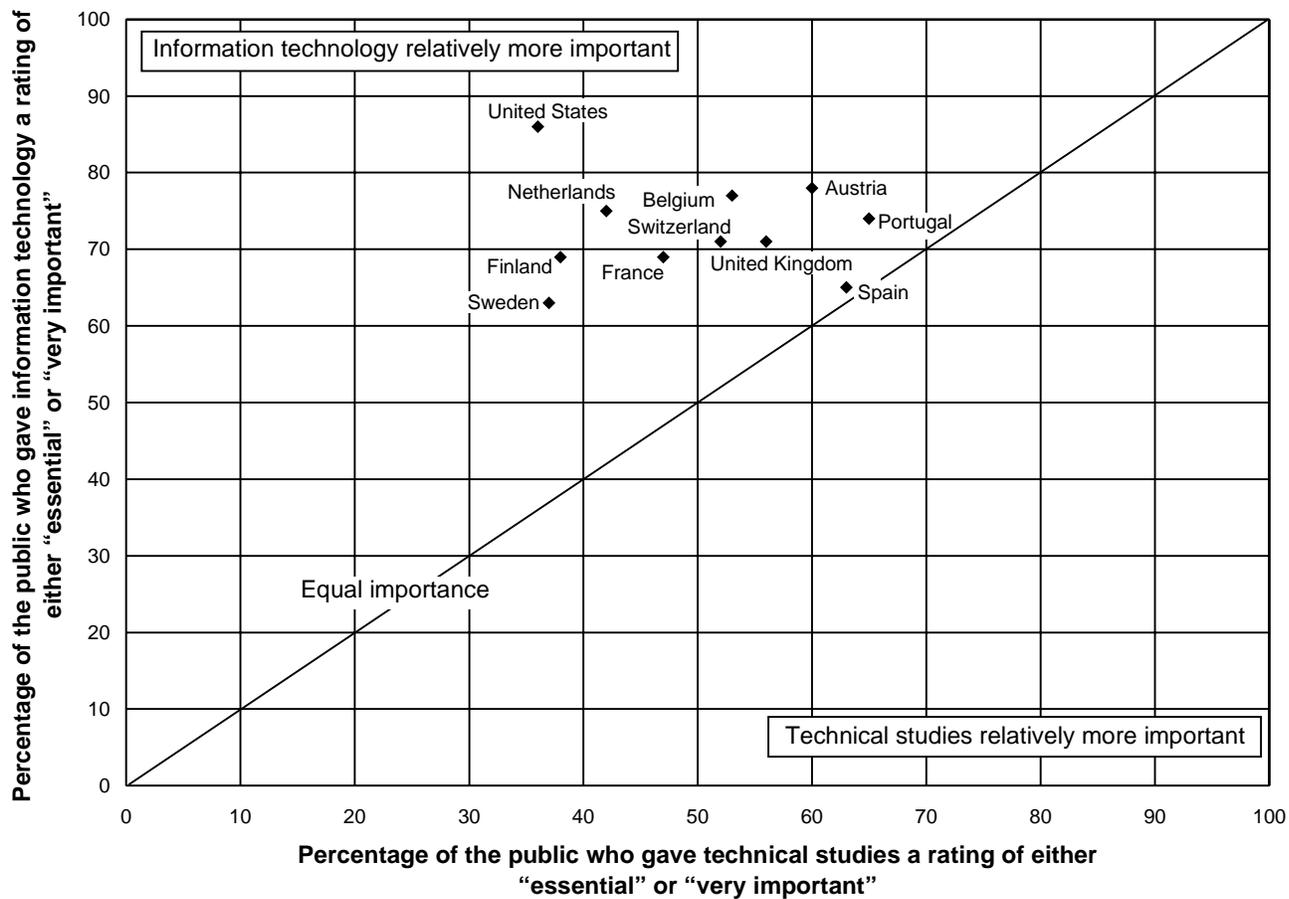
Figure 5.—Foreign language as an educational priority



*(The dotted line shows the percentage of the U.S. public who gave foreign languages a rating of either "essential" or "very important." The whisker plots show the 95 percent confidence interval.)*

*SOURCE: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Education at a Glance, 1995.*

Figure 6.—The importance of information technology and technical studies



SOURCE: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Education at a Glance, 1995

## **Importance of schools developing certain personal and social qualities and aptitudes in students**

In addition to the importance of subjects, the public was asked about how important it is for schools to develop certain personal and social qualities and aptitudes in students (e.g., self-confidence, the desire to continue studies/training, being a good citizen, etc.). There was a high level of agreement in the different countries on the importance of most of the personal and social qualities covered by the survey. Since many of the qualities the public was asked to rate are not formally recognized in the curriculum, one might have expected the public to rate most qualities lower than subjects but, in most cases, individual personal and social qualities were rated higher. Clearly, the public views the goals of schools as broader than the teaching of subjects.

In countries that participated in the survey, the public appears to attach considerable importance to the acquisition by students of confidence in their own individual strengths and the preparation of students for working life. In almost all countries, the public considered the development by schools of students' self-confidence and the skills and knowledge they need to get a job or continue studies or training to be the most important qualities. This finding may reflect the public's concern in many countries about the relatively high unemployment rate among young people.

- I In the United States, all qualities except one were rated as essential or very important by 80 percent or more of the public (table 2). Relatively less (about 67 percent) of the public in the United States thought developing an understanding of other countries was an essential or very important quality.
- I The development by schools of three personal and social qualities or aptitudes—self-confidence, the skills and knowledge needed to get a job, and the ability to live among people from different backgrounds—was considered essential or very important by 70 percent or more of the public in all countries (figure 7).
- I In ten countries, 85 percent or more of the public rated developing self-confidence essential or very important (figure 7).
- I The public in the United States held similar views to the public in several other countries on the importance of developing two qualities—self-confidence (figure 8) and the ability to live among people of different backgrounds (figure 9). In contrast, the U.S. public rated the importance of developing the skills and knowledge necessary to continue studies or training (figure 10) higher than the public in all other countries except Austria and Switzerland, and rated the importance of the skills and knowledge needed to get a job (figure 11) higher than the public in any other country.

Table 2.—Importance of qualities or aptitudes in each country<sup>1</sup> (The percentage of the public in each country who gave the quality listed a rating of either “essential” or “very important.”)

Quality	United States	Austria	Belgium	Denmark	Finland	France	Netherlands	Portugal	Spain	Sweden	Switzerland	United Kingdom	Quality average
Skills/knowledge to get a job	94	91	84	75	80	91	80	84	77	84	89	90	<b>85</b>
Skills/knowledge to continue studies/training	89	88	77	69	74	84	83	84	72	79	86	—	<b>80</b>
Self-confidence	89	93	90	87	88	93	90	81	75	90	93	87	<b>88</b>
Desire to continue studies/training	88	79	74	65	66	87	73	80	70	68	76	67	<b>74</b>
Being a good citizen	86	67	80	63	74	82	65	86	74	75	58	81	<b>74</b>
Lifestyle for good health	83	82	78	61	76	85	61	84	71	71	79	71	<b>75</b>
Live among people from different backgrounds	82	83	81	84	85	83	85	81	72	74	88	72	<b>81</b>
Understanding of other countries	67	71	61	61	61	64	63	70	65	60	74	48	<b>64</b>
<b>Country Average</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>75</b>	

<sup>1</sup>Qualities are listed according to the priorities of the U.S. public.

—The importance of the subject “Skills/knowledge to continue studies/training” was not asked for in the United Kingdom.

SOURCE: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Education at a Glance*, 1995.

Figure 7.—Importance of qualities or aptitudes in each country<sup>1</sup>

Quality	United States	Austria	Belgium	Denmark	Finland	France	Netherlands	Portugal	Spain	Sweden	Switzerland	United Kingdom
Skills/knowledge to get a job	P	P	I	I	I	P	I	I	I	I	P	P
Skills/knowledge to continue studies/training	P	P	I	i	I	I	I	I	I	I	P	—
Self-confidence	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	I	I	P	P	P
Desire to continue studies/training	P	I	I	i	i	P	I	I	I	i	I	i
Being a good citizen	P	i	I	i	I	I	i	P	I	I	i	I
Lifestyle for good health	I	I	I	i	I	P	i	I	I	I	I	I
Live among people from different backgrounds	I	I	I	I	P	I	P	I	I	I	P	I
Understanding of other countries	i	I	i	i	i	i	i	I	i	i	I	i

<sup>1</sup>Qualities are listed according to the priorities of the U.S. public.

—The importance of the subject "Skills/knowledge to continue studies/training" was not asked for in the United Kingdom.

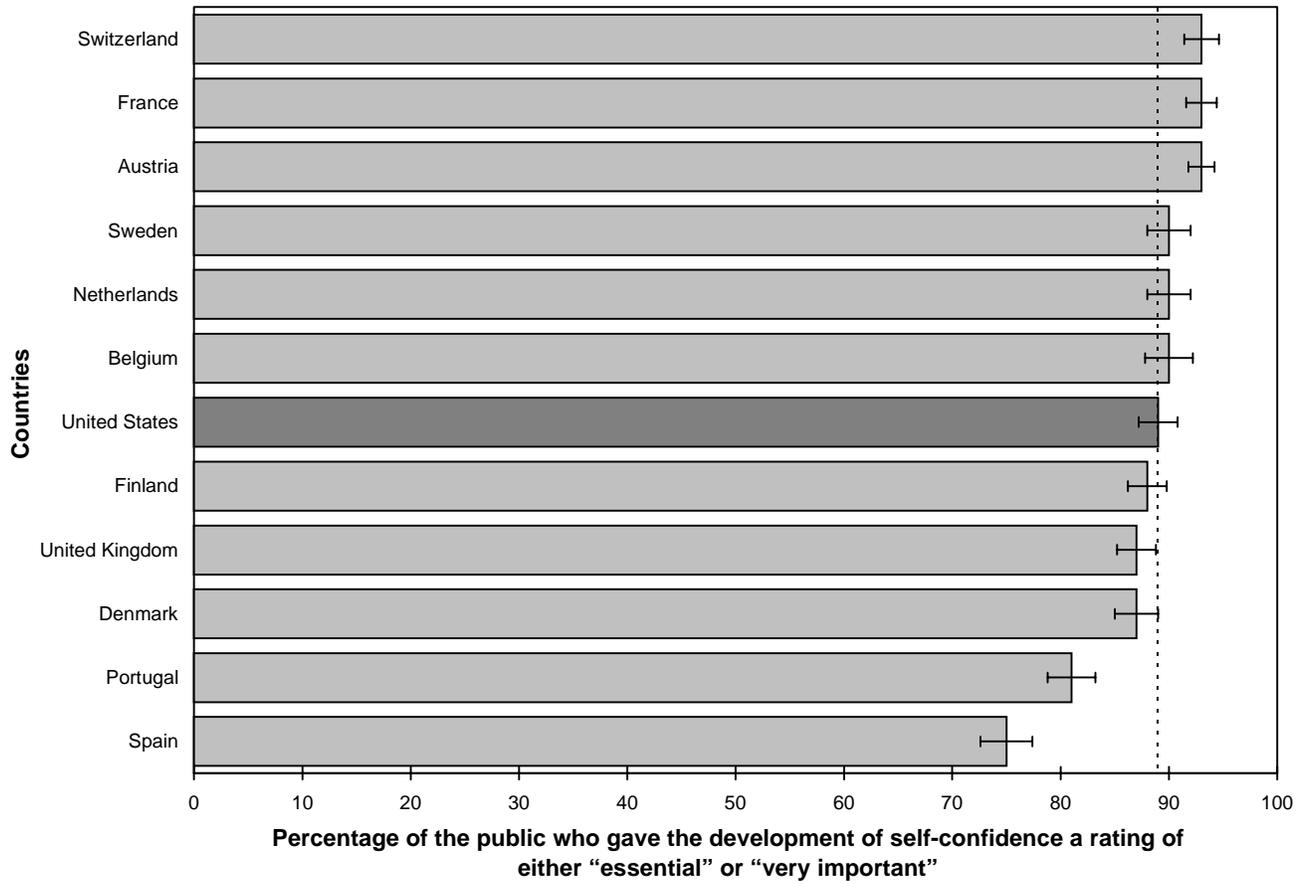
P Indicates that 85 percent or more of the public in this country gave the quality listed a rating of either "essential" or "very important."

I Indicates that 70 to 84 percent of the public in this country gave the quality listed a rating of either "essential" or "very important."

i Indicates that less than 70 percent of the public in this country gave the quality listed a rating of either "essential" or "very important."

SOURCE: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Education at a Glance*, 1995.

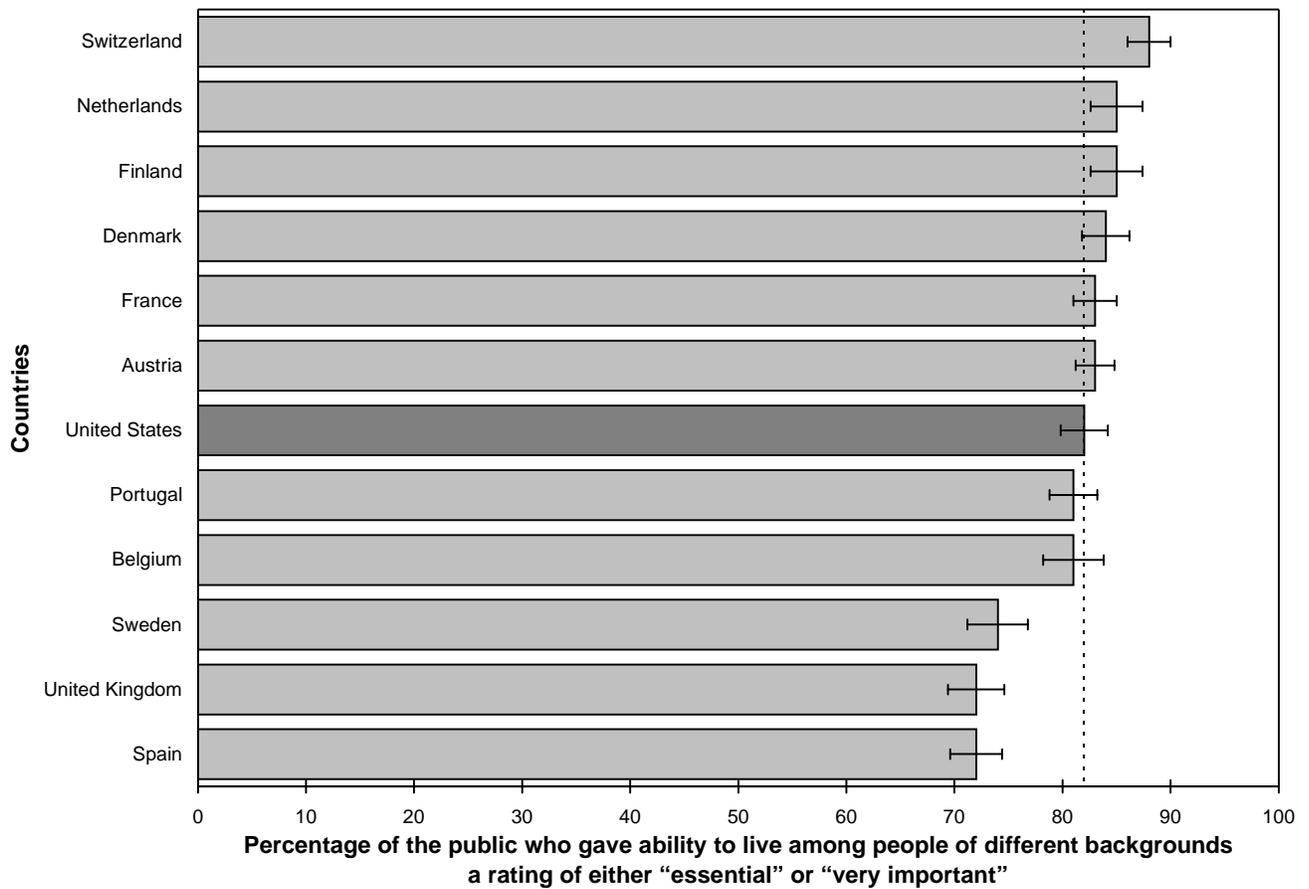
Figure 8.—Self-confidence as an educational priority



*(The dotted line shows the percentage of the U.S. public who gave self-confidence a rating of either "essential" or "very important." The whisker plots show the 95 percent confidence interval.)*

*SOURCE: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Education at a Glance, 1995.*

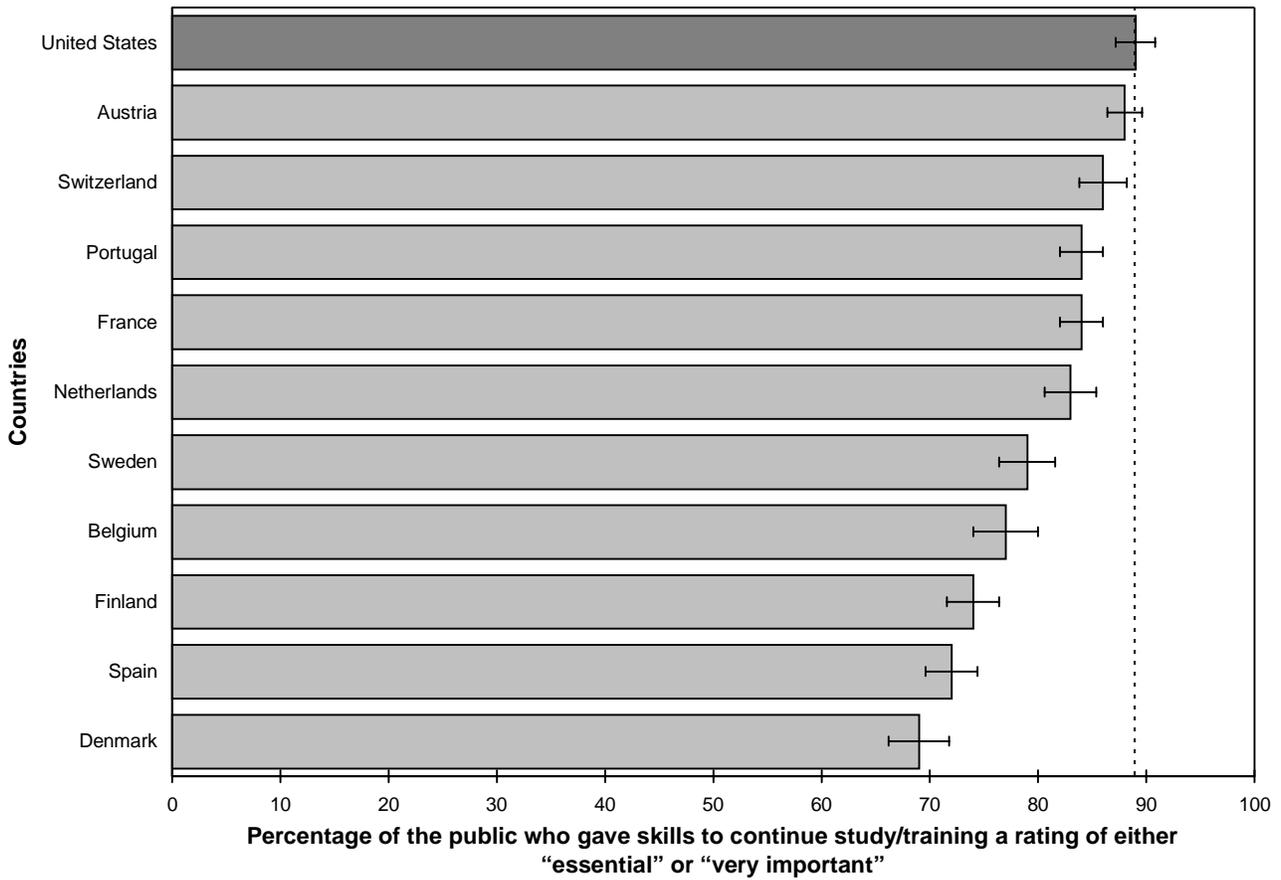
Figure 9.—Ability to live among people of different backgrounds as an educational priority



(The dotted line shows the percentage of the U.S. public who gave the ability to live among people of different backgrounds a rating of either "essential" or "very important." The whisker plots show the 95 percent confidence interval.)

SOURCE: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Education at a Glance, 1995.

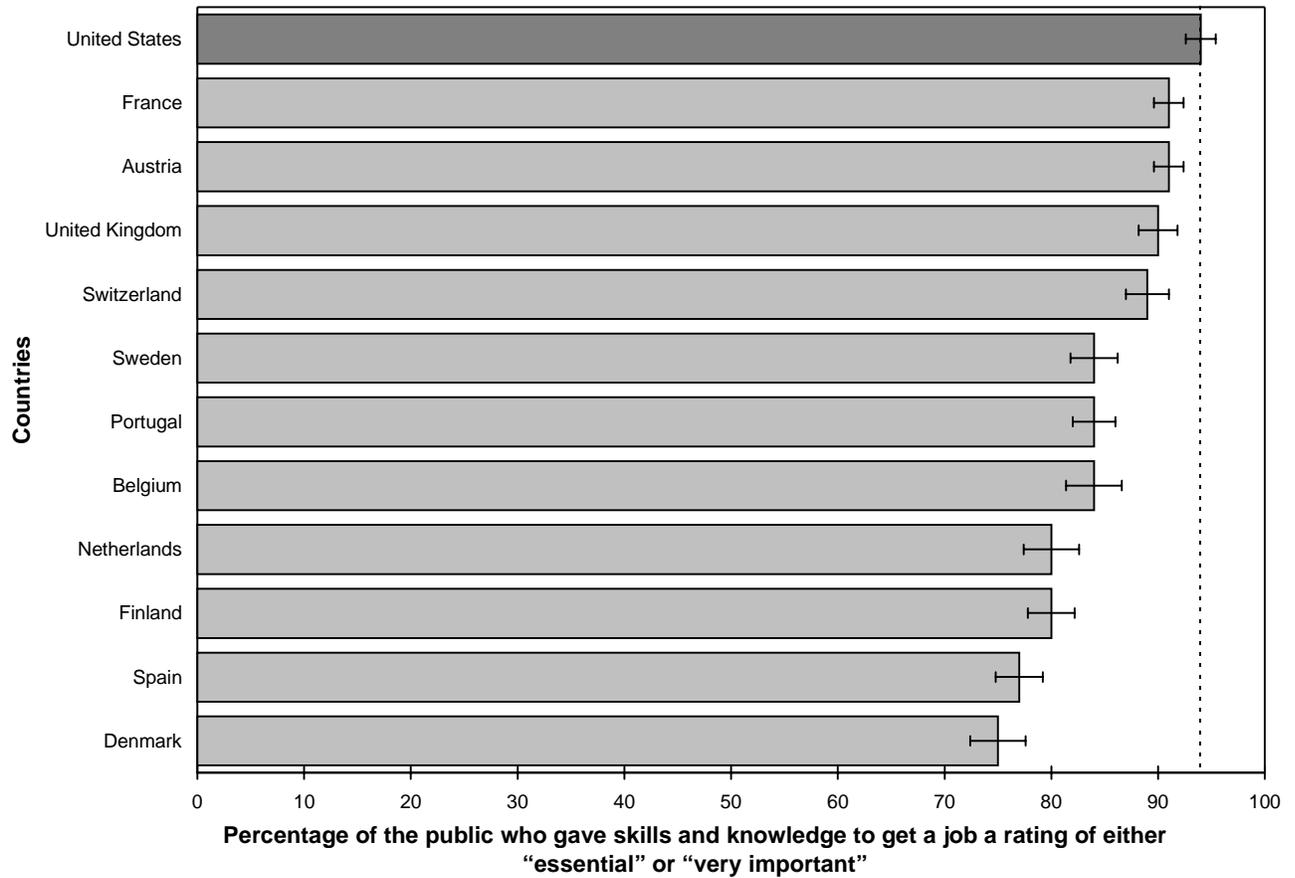
Figure 10.—Development of skills and knowledge to continue studies or training as an educational priority



*(The dotted line shows the percentage of the U.S. public who gave skills and knowledge to continue studies or training a rating of either "essential" or "very important." The whisker plots show the 95 percent confidence interval.)*

*SOURCE: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Education at a Glance, 1995.*

Figure 11.—Development of skills and knowledge to get a job as an educational priority



(The dotted line shows the percentage of the U.S. public who gave skills and knowledge to get a job a rating of either "essential" or "very important." The whisker plots show the 95 percent confidence interval.)

SOURCE: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Education at a Glance, 1995.

## Confidence that subjects are taught well

The public's confidence in whether subjects are being taught well in relation to their opinion about the importance of these subjects can be used to gauge how effectively the public thinks the school system is achieving priorities. Asking the public about the importance of subjects helps to reveal its expectations for the system. Its confidence in how well these subjects are being taught may indicate its level of satisfaction. Any gap between importance and confidence could be viewed as unfulfilled expectations, and may indicate where priorities should be given. For example, in the United States, the proportion of the public that considered the teaching of foreign languages essential or very important was the same as the proportion that considered that this subject was being taught well (about 53 percent). In contrast, about 96 percent of the U.S. public rated mathematics essential or very important, but only about 70 percent considered the subject was being taught well.

- I In five countries—Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, and Switzerland—70 percent or more of the public was very confident or fairly confident that at least half the subjects were being taught well (figure 12). In Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, less than 70 percent of the public were very confident or fairly confident that any of the subjects were being taught well.
- I The discrepancy between the importance of mathematics and the public's confidence that it was being taught well was greater in some countries than in others (figure 13). This difference was greatest for Sweden (about 91 percent and about 48 percent for importance and confidence, respectively). The difference between importance and confidence was similar in the United States, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom (ranging from about 22 to about 28 percentage points) and larger than the difference found in other countries.
- I With the exception of Belgium and Finland, confidence that the native language was being taught well was lower than the feeling that native language was essential or very important (figure 14). Similar to mathematics, this difference was large in several countries, including the United States where the responses were about 92 percent and about 66 percent for importance and confidence, respectively.
- I In seven of the twelve countries, confidence that the sciences were being taught well was higher than the feeling that this subject was essential or very important (figure 15). For the public in four countries, including the United States, confidence that the sciences were being taught well was substantially lower than the feeling that this subject was essential or very important.
- I In the United States, the proportion of the public who was very confident or fairly confident that foreign languages were being taught well (about 53 percent) was about the same as the proportion who felt that this subject was essential or very important (figure 16).

Table 3.—Confidence that subjects are being taught well<sup>1</sup> (The percentage of the public in each country who gave the subject listed a rating of either “very confident” or “fairly confident.”)

Subject	United States	Austria	Belgium	Denmark	Finland	France	Netherlands	Portugal	Spain	Sweden	Switzerland	United Kingdom	Subject average
Mathematics	70	85	85	82	76	92	71	57	50	48	84	64	<b>72</b>
Information Technology	67	64	66	64	57	77	53	47	33	24	68	65	<b>57</b>
English/Native Language	66	82	84	75	78	88	65	58	49	46	79	61	<b>69</b>
Social Subjects	66	77	72	69	71	87	59	59	49	30	76	62	<b>65</b>
Physical Education	64	71	54	66	59	78	50	49	35	23	78	63	<b>58</b>
The Sciences	64	78	80	77	72	86	71	59	44	32	79	65	<b>67</b>
Technical Studies	58	60	67	—	58	78	42	45	31	21	64	57	<b>53</b>
The Arts	56	68	47	67	53	62	39	48	29	17	64	49	<b>50</b>
Foreign Languages	53	78	78	82	76	84	73	60	40	42	75	50	<b>66</b>
Education for Citizenship	48	62	42	69	55	64	40	41	33	29	62	38	<b>49</b>
<b>Country Average</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>31<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>73</b>	<b>57</b>	

<sup>1</sup>Subjects are listed according to the priorities of the U.S. public.

<sup>2</sup>Refer to the Technical Note section for a comment on the results for Sweden.

—Confidence in the teaching of the subject “Technical Studies” was not asked for in Denmark.

SOURCE: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), The General Public’s Expectations of, and Confidence in, Education. April 1993.

Figure 12.—Confidence that subjects are being taught well<sup>1</sup>

Subject	United States	Austria	Belgium	Denmark	Finland	France	Netherlands	Portugal	Spain	Sweden	Switzerland	United Kingdom
Mathematics	I	P	P	I	I	P	I	i	i	i	I	i
Information Technology	i	i	i	i	i	I	i	i	i	i	i	i
English/Native Language	i	I	I	I	I	P	i	i	i	i	I	i
Social Subjects	i	I	I	i	I	P	i	i	i	i	I	i
Physical Education	i	I	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	I	i
The Sciences	i	I	I	I	I	P	I	i	i	i	I	i
Technical Studies	i	i	i	—	i	I	i	i	i	i	i	i
The Arts	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i
Foreign Languages	i	I	I	I	I	I	I	i	i	i	I	i
Education for Citizenship	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i

<sup>1</sup>Subjects are listed according to the priorities of the U.S. public.

—Confidence in the teaching of the subject "Technical Studies" was not asked for in Denmark.

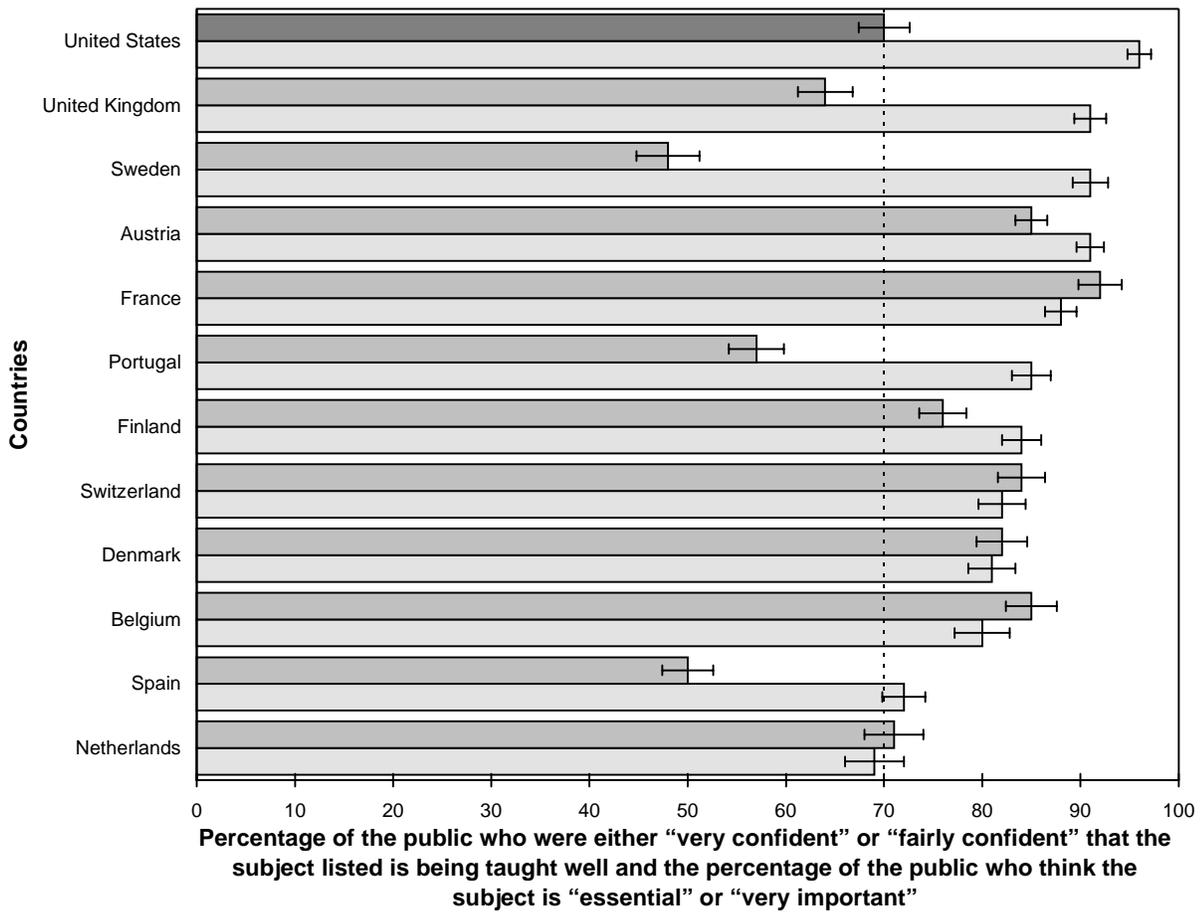
P Indicates that 85 percent or more of the public in this country gave the subject listed a rating of either "very confident" or "fairly confident."

I Indicates that 70 to 84 percent of the public in this country gave the subject listed a rating of either "essential" or "very important."

i Indicates that less than 70 percent of the public in this country gave the subject listed a rating of either "essential" or "very important."

SOURCE: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *The General Public's Expectations of, and Confidence in, Education*, April 1993.

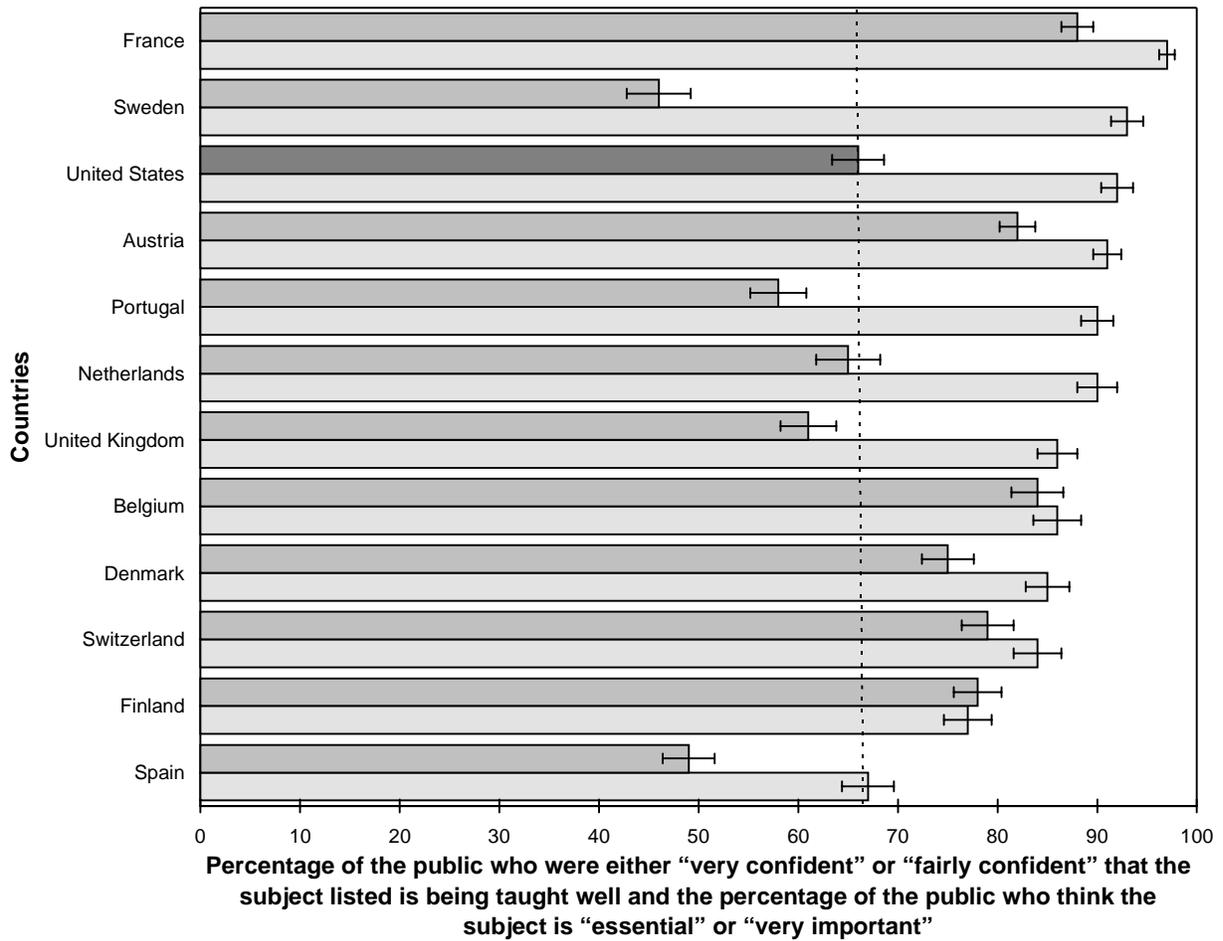
Figure 13.—Confidence that mathematics is being taught well compared to the importance of this subject



(The dark columns indicate confidence and the lighter columns indicate importance. The dotted line shows the percentage of the U.S. public who were either "very" or "fairly confident" that mathematics is being taught well. The whisker plots show the 95 percent confidence interval.)

SOURCES: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Education at a Glance, 1995; and The General Public's Expectations of, and Confidence in, Education, April 1993.

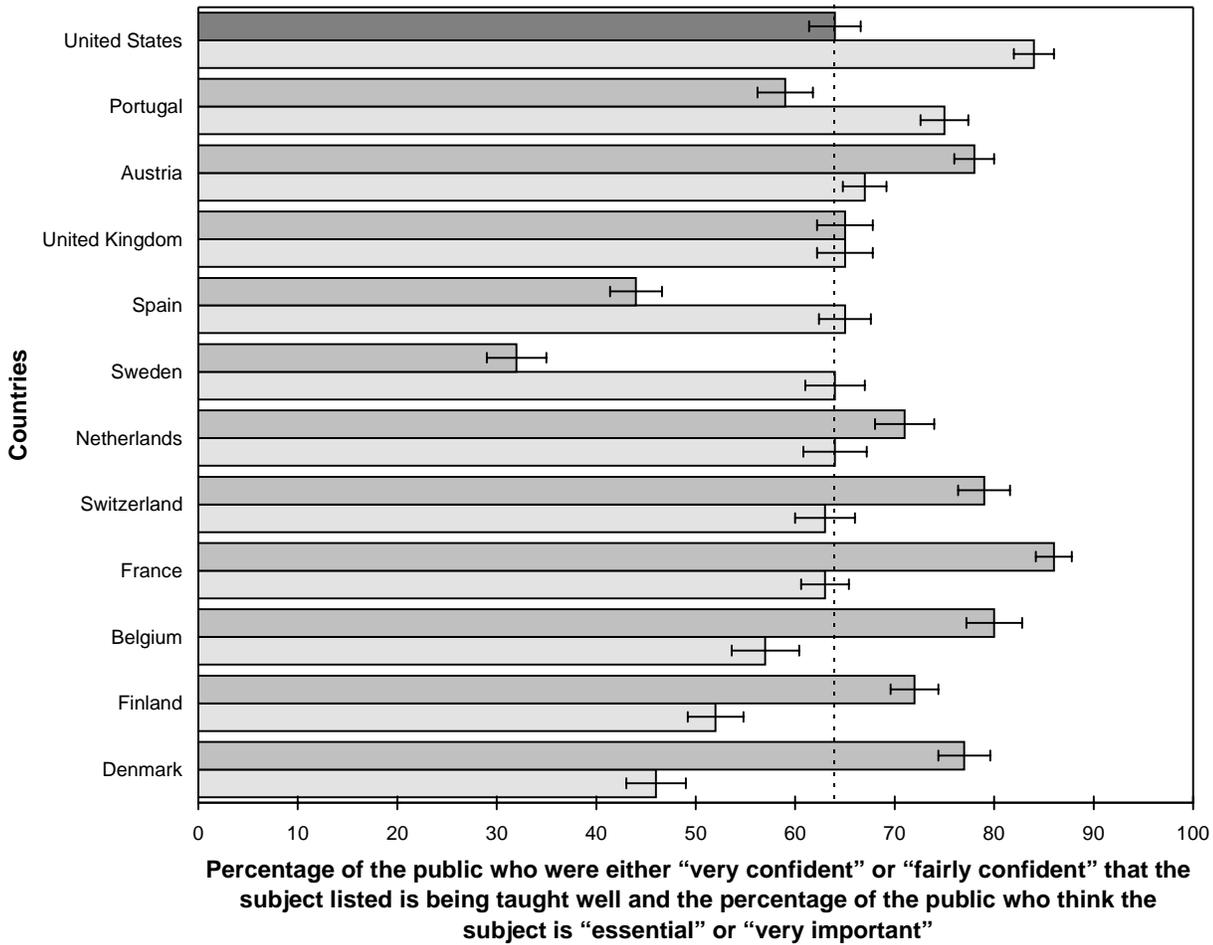
Figure 14.—Confidence that native language is being taught well compared to the importance of this subject



*(The dark columns indicate confidence and the lighter columns indicate importance. The dotted line shows the percentage of the U.S. public who were either “very” or “fairly confident” that native language is being taught well. The whisker plots show the 95 percent confidence interval.)*

*SOURCES: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Education at a Glance, 1995; and The General Public’s Expectations of, and Confidence in, Education, April 1993.*

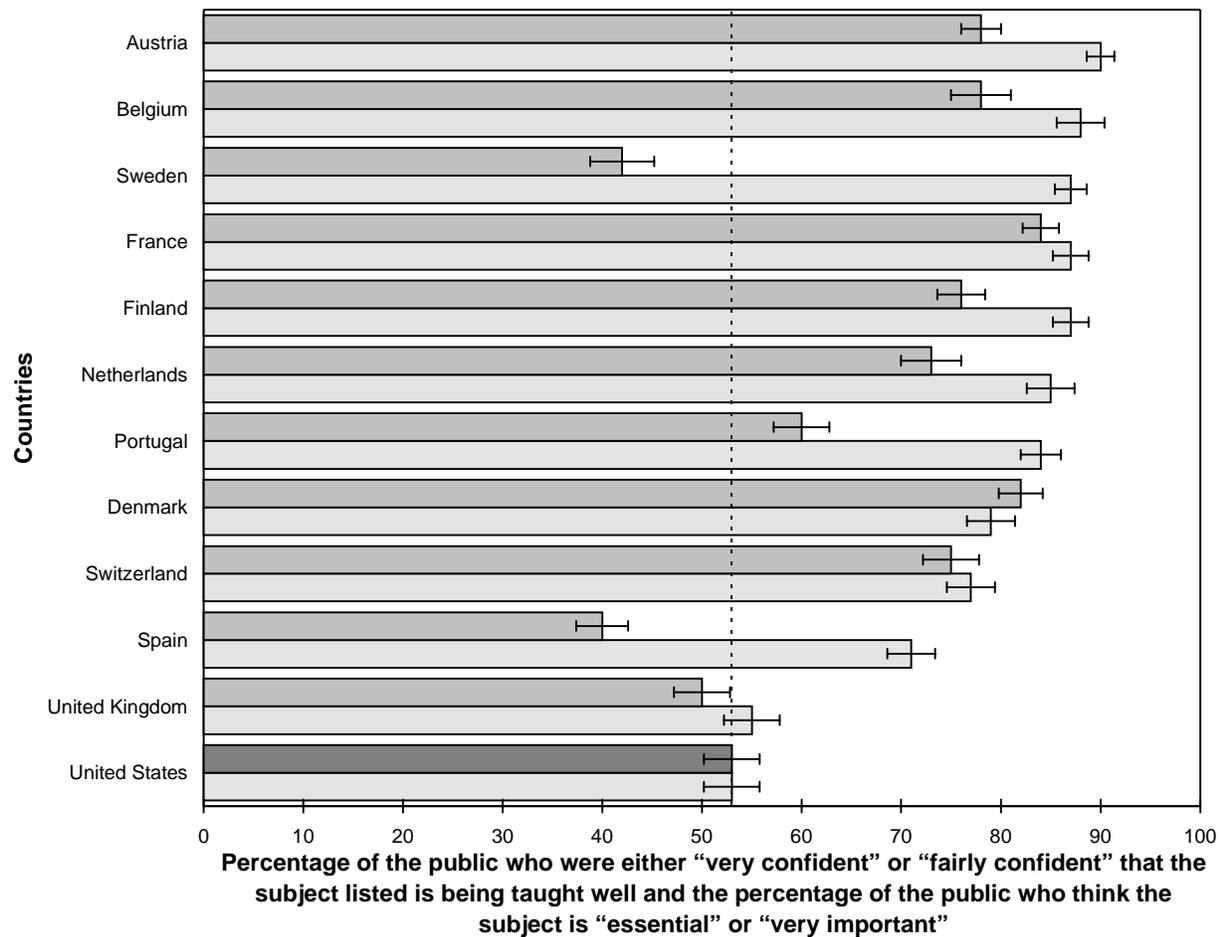
Figure 15.—Confidence that sciences are being taught well compared to the importance of this subject



*(The dark columns indicate confidence and the lighter columns indicate importance. The dotted line shows the percentage of the U.S. public who were either “very” or “fairly confident” that sciences are being taught well. The whisker plots show the 95 percent confidence interval.)*

*SOURCES: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Education at a Glance, 1995; and The General Public’s Expectations of, and Confidence in, Education, April 1993.*

Figure 16.—Confidence that foreign languages are being taught well compared to the importance of this subject



*(The dark columns indicate confidence and the lighter columns indicate importance. The dotted line shows the percentage of the U.S. public who were either "very" or "fairly confident" that foreign languages are being taught well. The whisker plots show the 95 percent confidence interval.)*

*SOURCES: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Education at a Glance, 1995; and The General Public's Expectations of, and Confidence in, Education, April 1993.*

### **Confidence that schools have a major effect on the development of certain personal and social qualities**

Although the public in all countries considered the development of personal and social qualities important, they were much less likely to have confidence that schools have a major effect on the development of these qualities. Generally, the public's confidence that personal and social qualities were being developed well in the schools was even lower than their confidence in the teaching of subjects. The public was relatively more confident that some qualities over which schools have more direct control were being developed well, such as the desire to continue studies or training and the skills and knowledge needed to get a job. In contrast, confidence was less in the schools' role in developing personal and social qualities where schools have less direct control, such as the ability to live among people from different backgrounds.

- I In eight of the twelve countries, including the United States, less than 70 percent of the public were very confident or fairly confident that schools were developing any of the qualities well (figure 17). There were only two qualities—the skills and knowledge to continue studies or training and increasing the desire of students to continue studies or training—in which 70 percent or more of the public in any country were very confident or fairly confident that schools were developing them well.
- I In all countries except Denmark, the public's confidence that the skills and knowledge to continue studies and training were being developed well was lower than its feelings about the importance of this quality (figure 18).
- I The public's confidence that students' self-confidence was being developed well was substantially lower in all countries than the importance attached to this quality (figure 19). A similar observation applies to some of the other qualities, including the skills and knowledge needed to get a job (figure 20) and the ability to live among people from different backgrounds (figure 21).

Table 4.—Confidence that schools have a major effect on the development of certain qualities<sup>1</sup>  
 (The percentage of the public in each country who gave the quality listed a rating of either  
 “very confident” or “fairly confident.”)

Quality	United States	Austria	Belgium	Denmark	Finland	France	Netherlands	Portugal	Spain	Sweden	Switzerland	United Kingdom	Quality average
Skills/knowledge to continue studies/training	69	70	66	78	67	69	66	53	37	28	75	—	<b>62</b>
Desire to continue studies/training	67	74	70	76	61	68	62	55	35	21	76	53	<b>60</b>
Skills/knowledge to get a job	63	62	56	68	44	50	46	47	31	17	66	54	<b>50</b>
Lifestyle for good health	60	51	47	50	53	56	28	51	32	14	54	38	<b>45</b>
Being a good citizen	59	59	50	66	53	57	37	53	32	18	51	38	<b>48</b>
Understanding of other countries	48	60	59	69	49	63	50	52	32	13	62	37	<b>50</b>
Self-confidence	47	51	52	63	35	61	42	51	30	10	53	46	<b>45</b>
Live among people from different backgrounds	47	59	52	68	41	68	49	52	35	10	61	39	<b>48</b>
<b>Country Average</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>16<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>62</b>	<b>44</b>	

<sup>1</sup>Qualities are listed according to the priorities of the U.S. public.

<sup>2</sup>Refer to the Technical Notes section for a comment on the results for Sweden.

—Confidence in the quality “Skills/knowledge to continue studies/training” was not asked for in the United Kingdom.

SOURCE: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Education at a Glance*, 1995.

Figure 17.—Confidence that schools have a major effect on the development of certain qualities<sup>1</sup>

Quality	United States	Austria	Belgium	Denmark	Finland	France	Netherlands	Portugal	Spain	Sweden	Switzerland	United Kingdom
Skills/knowledge to continue studies/training	i	I	i	I	i	i	i	i	i	i	I	—
Desire to continue studies/training	i	I	I	I	i	i	i	i	i	i	I	i
Skills/knowledge to get a job	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i
Lifestyle for good health	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i
Being a good citizen	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i
Understanding of other countries	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i
Self-confidence	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i
Live among people from different backgrounds	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i

<sup>1</sup>Qualities are listed according to the priorities of the U.S. public.

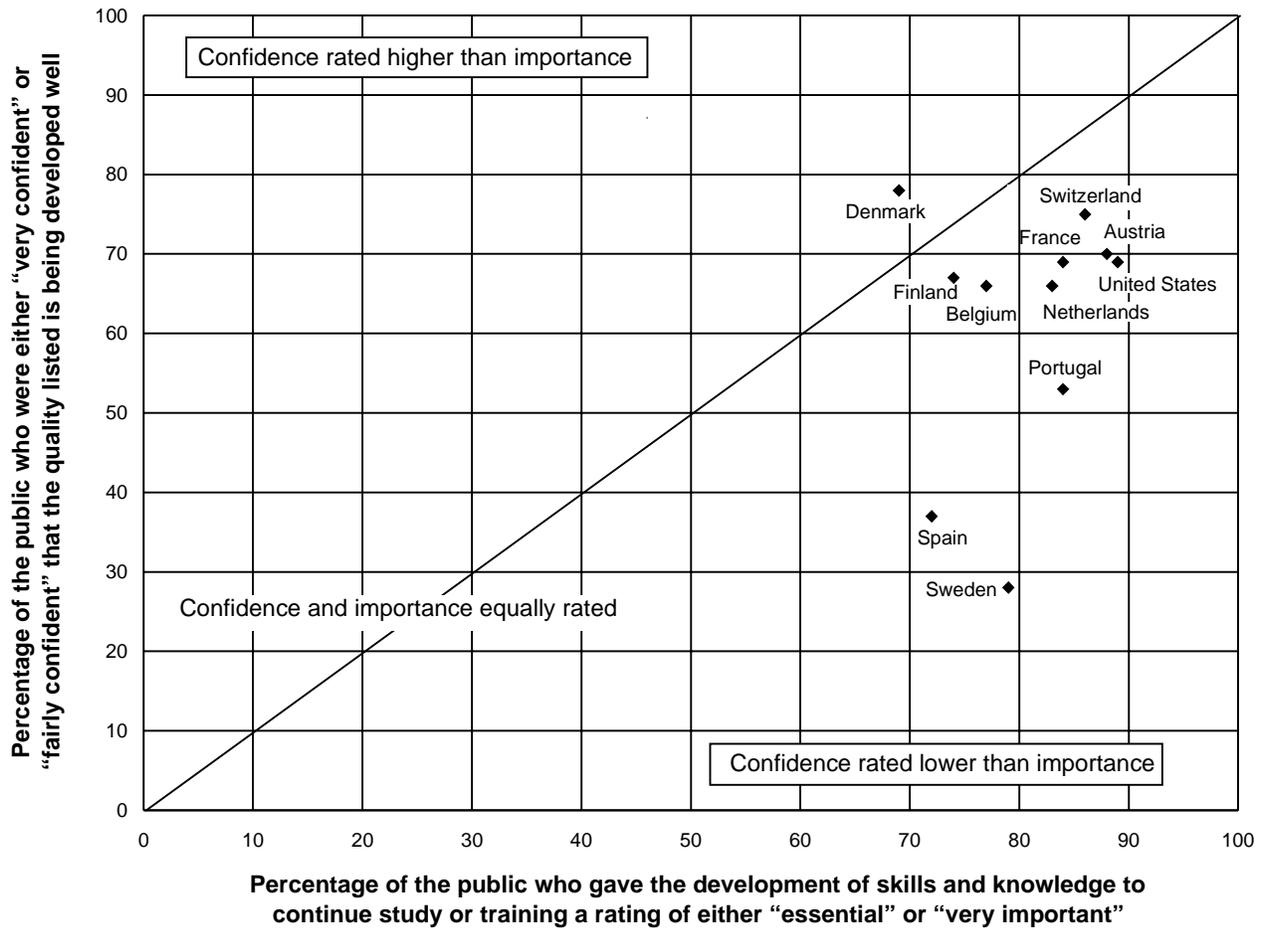
—Confidence in the quality "Skills/knowledge to continue studies/training" was not asked for in the United Kingdom.

I Indicates that 70 to 84 percent of the public in this country gave the quality listed a rating of either "essential" or "very important."

i Indicates that less than 70 percent of the public in this country gave the quality listed a rating of either "essential" or "very important."

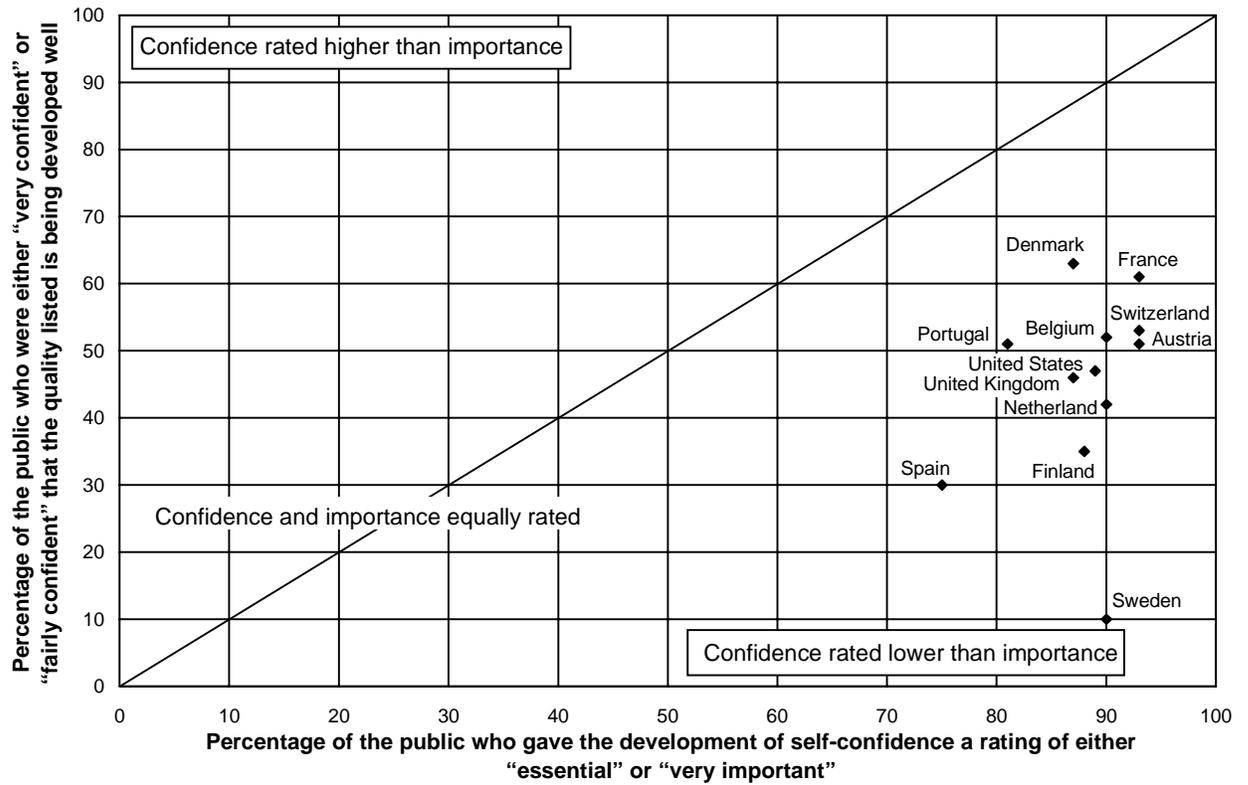
SOURCE: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Education at a Glance*, 1995.

Figure 18.—Confidence that skills/knowledge to continue studies/training are being developed well compared to the importance of this quality



SOURCE: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Education at a Glance, 1995.

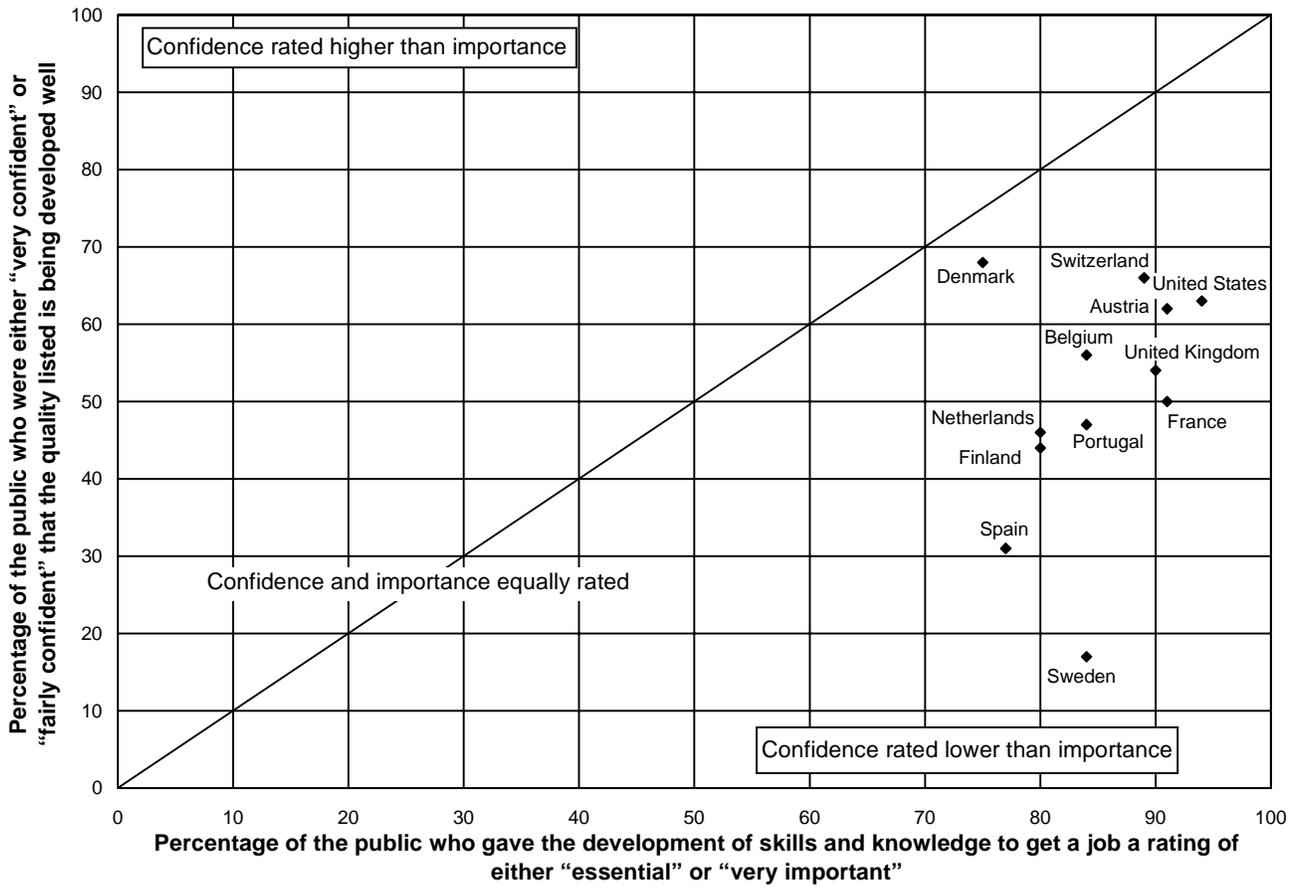
Figure 19.—Confidence that self-confidence is being developed well compared to the importance of this quality



SOURCE: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Education at a Glance, 1995.

NOTE: Refer to the Technical Note section for a comment on the results for Sweden.

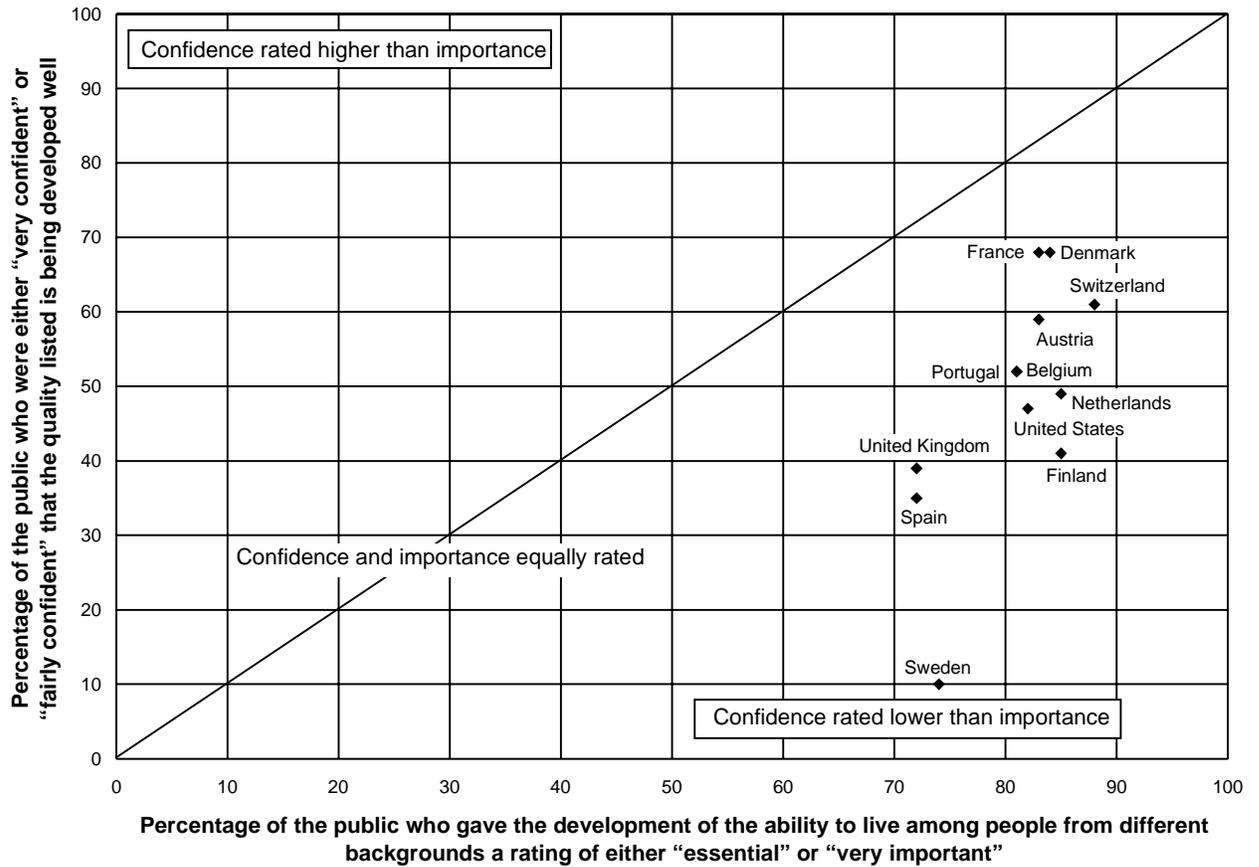
Figure 20.—Confidence that skills/knowledge to get a job are being developed well compared to the importance of this quality



SOURCE: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Education at a Glance, 1995.

NOTE: Refer to the Technical Note section for a comment on the results for Sweden.

Figure 21.—Confidence that the ability to live among people from different backgrounds is being developed well compared to the importance of this quality



SOURCE: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Education at a Glance, 1995*.

NOTE: Refer to the Technical Note section for a comment on the results for Sweden.

### **Important practices to emphasize in order for schools to achieve their goals**

In most OECD countries increasing importance is being placed on activities at the school level, such as control over budgets.<sup>12</sup> Survey respondents were asked to select practices they felt were important for schools to emphasize in order for them to achieve their goals. Their responses to this question help illustrate how the public expects schools to be effective. There was a high level of agreement across countries on the importance of some practices, but wide differences of views on others. There was general agreement that keeping parents well informed and involved, helping with learning difficulties, and career advice and guidance were important practices to emphasize. In some countries, the public felt that maintaining discipline and strong leadership from the school principal were also important.

- I Keeping parents well informed and involved and helping with learning difficulties were regarded as essential or very important practices for secondary schools to emphasize in order to achieve their goals by 70 percent or more of the public in all countries (figure 22). The public in most countries regarded a wide range of subjects taught and the regular assignment of homework as less important practices to emphasize.
- I In most countries there were at least two practices that 85 percent or more of the public viewed as essential or very important (figure 22). Four practices received this level of support among the U.S. public—keeping parents well informed and involved, maintaining discipline, helping with learning difficulties, and strong leadership from the school principal.
- I The public in the United States rated keeping parents well informed and involved (figure 23) as more important than the public in any other country. About 95 percent of the U.S. public rated this practice as essential or very important compared to about 88 percent in Switzerland and about 71 percent in Finland.
- I Strong leadership from the school principal was regarded as essential or very important by a large proportion of the public in the United States (about 85 percent). In contrast, less than 50 percent of the public in Austria, Denmark, Finland, and Spain viewed strong leadership from the school principal as needing to be emphasized in order for a school to achieve its goals (figure 24).
- I With the exception of Denmark, 70 percent or more of the public in each country also considered career advice and guidance as an essential or very important practice to emphasize (figure 26).

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12. *Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (1995). Public Expectation of the Final Stage of Compulsory Education. Paris: Author, p. 47.*

Table 5.—Priorities in school practices in each country<sup>1</sup> (The percentage of the public in each country who gave the practice listed a rating of either “essential” or “very important.”)

Practice	United States	Austria	Belgium	Denmark	Finland	France	Netherlands	Portugal	Spain	Sweden	Switzerland	United Kingdom	Practice average
Keeping parents well informed and involved	95	85	85	74	71	76	83	85	74	79	88	85	<b>82</b>
Maintaining discipline	93	72	81	56	90	89	69	78	60	78	67	88	<b>74</b>
Helping with learning difficulties	92	91	92	81	87	94	92	86	75	88	92	92	<b>89</b>
Strong leadership from principal	85	47	73	46	39	82	61	68	37	61	56	74	<b>61</b>
Careers advice and guidance	84	92	76	66	73	93	91	90	71	76	92	84	<b>80</b>
Wide range of subjects taught	79	69	73	51	27	70	67	38	55	47	71	69	<b>60</b>
Regular homework	78	57	58	39	70	57	60	66	38	49	52	63	<b>57</b>
<b>Country Average</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>79</b>	

<sup>1</sup>Practices are listed according to the priorities of the U.S. public.

SOURCE: Organization for Organization Co-operation and Development (OECD), Education at a Glance, 1995.

Figure 22.—Priorities in school practices in each country<sup>1</sup>

Practice	United States	Austria	Belgium	Denmark	Finland	France	Netherlands	Portugal	Spain	Sweden	Switzerland	United Kingdom
Keeping parents well informed and involved	P	P	P	I	I	I	I	P	I	I	P	P
Maintaining discipline	P	I	I	i	P	P	i	I	i	I	i	P
Helping with learning difficulties	P	P	P	I	P	P	P	P	I	P	P	P
Strong leadership from principal	P	i	I	i	i	I	i	i	i	i	i	I
Careers advice and guidance	I	P	I	i	I	P	P	P	I	I	P	I
Wide range of subjects taught	I	i	I	i	i	I	i	i	i	i	I	i
Regular homework	I	i	i	i	I	i	i	i	i	i	i	i

<sup>1</sup>Practices are listed according to the priorities of the U.S. public.

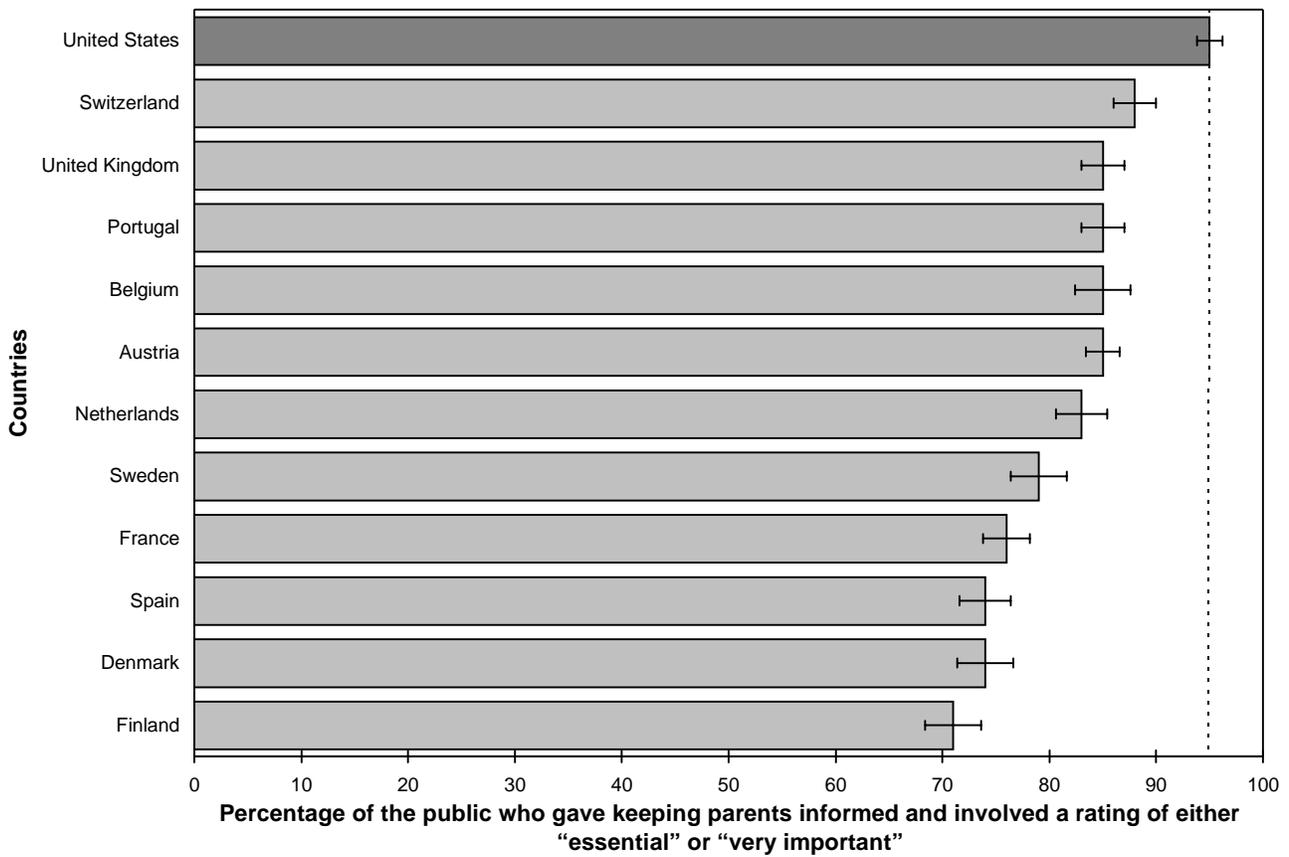
P Indicates that 85 percent or more of the public in this country gave the practice listed a rating of either "essential" or "very important."

I Indicates that 70 to 84 percent of the public in this country gave the practice listed a rating of either "essential" or "very important."

i Indicates that less than 70 percent of the public in this country gave the practice listed a rating of either "essential" or "very important."

SOURCE: Organization for Organization Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Education at a Glance, 1995*.

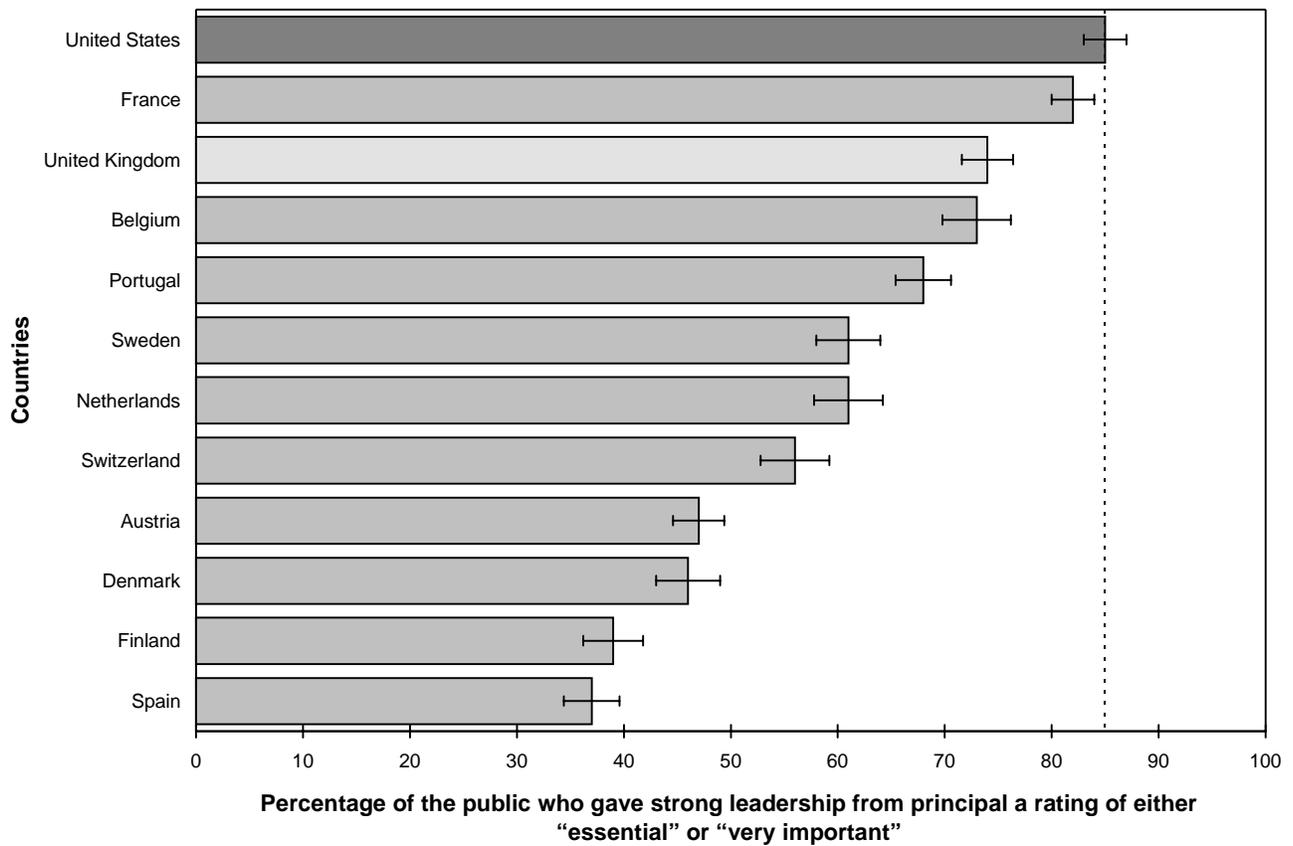
Figure 23.—Keeping parents well informed and involved as a priority in school practices



*(The dotted line shows the percentage of the U.S. public who gave keeping parents well informed and involved a rating of either "essential" or "very important." The whisker plots show the 95 percent confidence interval.)*

*SOURCE: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Education at a Glance, 1995.*

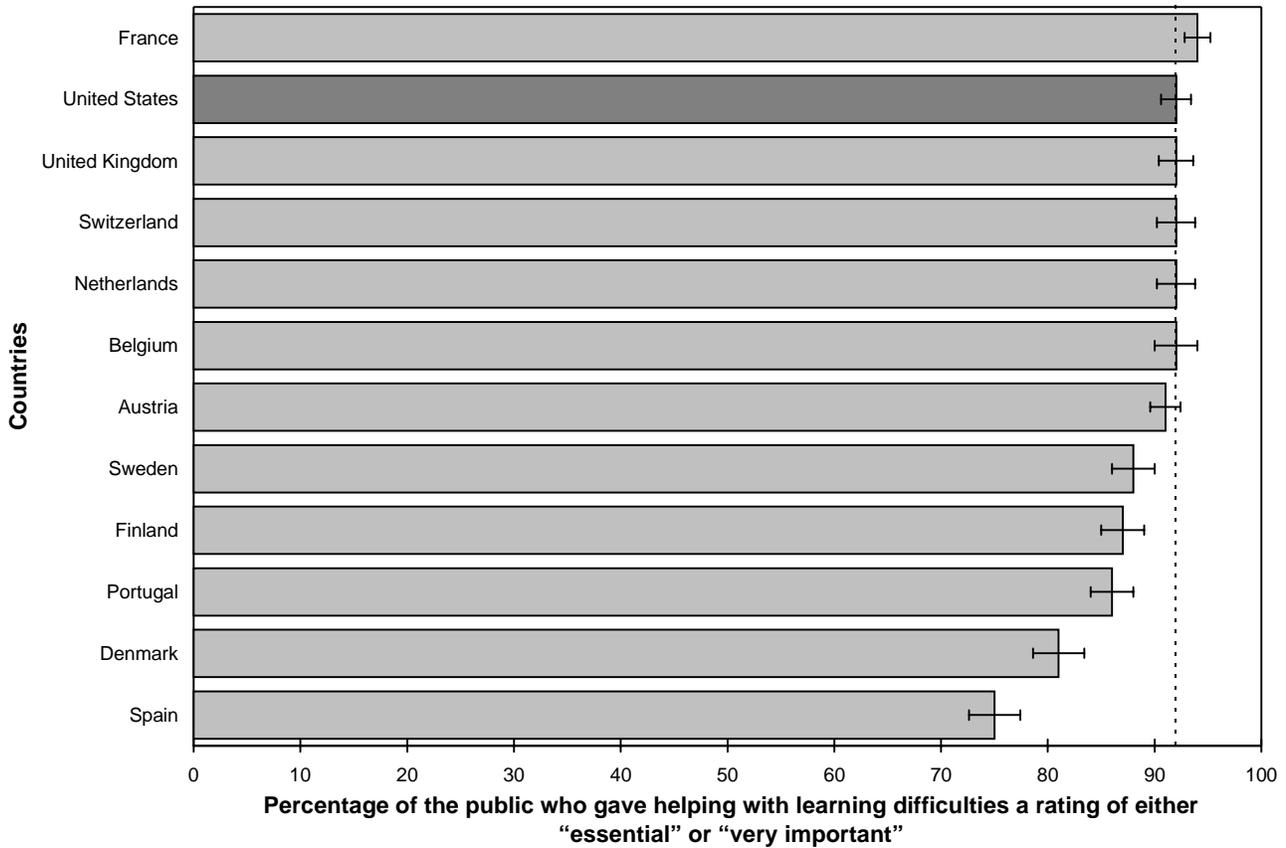
Figure 24.—Strong leadership from the principal as a priority in school practices



(The dotted line shows the percentage of the U.S. public who gave strong leadership from principal a rating of either "essential" or "very important." The whisker plots show the 95 percent confidence interval.)

SOURCE: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Education at a Glance, 1995.

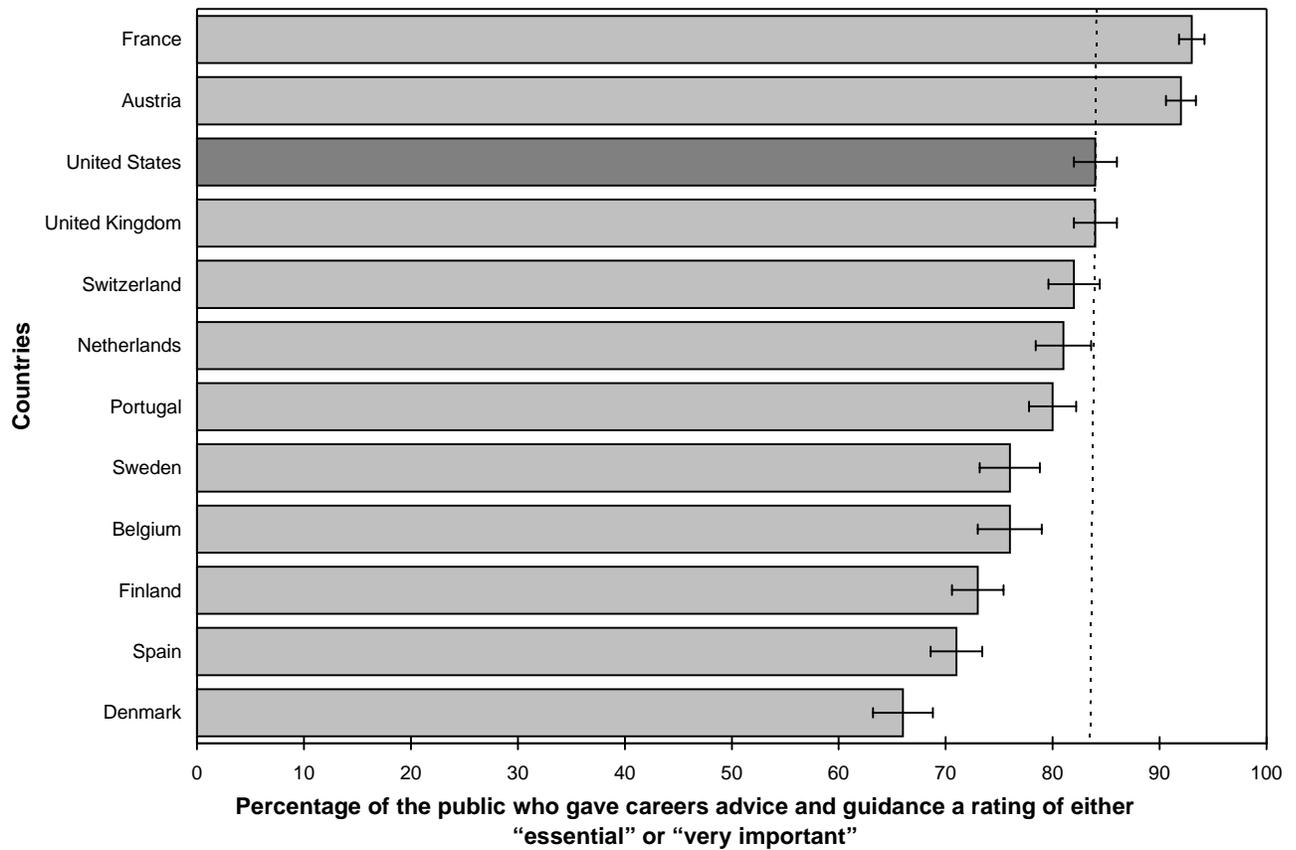
Figure 25.—Helping with learning difficulties as a priority in school practices



*(The dotted line shows the percentage of the U.S. public who gave helping with learning difficulties a rating of either "essential" or "very important." The whisker plots show the 95 percent confidence interval.)*

*SOURCE: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Education at a Glance, 1995.*

Figure 26.—Careers advice and guidance as a priority in school practices



*(The dotted line shows the percentage of the U.S. public who gave careers advice and guidance a rating of either "essential" or "very important." The whisker plots show the 95 percent confidence interval.)*

*SOURCE: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Education at a Glance, 1995.*

### Importance of decision making at the school level

In many OECD countries, regardless of whether control of their systems is centralized or decentralized, major efforts are under way to increase the decision-making authority of schools.<sup>13</sup> Schools are being given greater autonomy and are being made more accountable for results.<sup>14</sup> The U.S. public places more importance on decision making at the school level than the public in other OECD countries. The majority of the public in the United States considered it very important for all the decisions that were queried to be made by the school itself. In most other countries, less than half the public felt this way for any of the decisions.

The direction in which policy regarding school autonomy is moving in most countries appears to be supported by the survey results. Schools in most countries are obtaining more autonomy in budgeting, personnel selection, and curriculum development.<sup>15</sup> These are the areas that received the most support from the public. Regarding curriculum development, there was broader public support for how subjects are taught than for what subjects are taught or the amount of time devoted to them. Despite the trend toward greater school autonomy, the two latter decisions are still made centrally, at least for some subjects, in most OECD countries.<sup>16</sup>

- I Teacher selection and promotion, how the school budget is spent, and how subjects are taught were decisions that about 50 percent or more of the public in three or more countries rated as very important for schools to make (table 6).
- I In the United States, 50 percent or more of the public regarded it as very important that each of the decisions identified be made by the individual school (figure 27). In France, four of the six decisions were rated high by 50 percent or more of the public, and in Portugal this was the case for three of the six decisions. In seven countries, none of the decisions listed was regarded as very important by 50 percent or more of the respondents.
- I In some countries, such as France, Sweden, and the Netherlands, the public made substantial distinctions between what decisions they consider important for schools to make (figure 28). In contrast, the public in the United States and Spain made fewer distinctions.
- I In five countries, there was at least one decision that 50 percent or more of the public thought important to be made by the school itself (figure 28).

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13. Husen, T., Tuijman, A. and Halls, W. (1992). *Schooling in Modern European Society*. Oxford: Pergamon, pp. 85-86.

14. *Ibid*, p. 85.

15. *Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (1995)*. *Public Expectations of the Final Stage of Compulsory Education*. Paris: Author, p. 47.

16. *Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (1995)*. *Public Expectations of the Final Stage of Compulsory Education*. Paris: Author, pp. 48-49.

I In all countries, the public considered it relatively more important for schools to make decisions about how subjects are taught than decisions regarding what subjects are taught (figure 29).

Table 6.—Importance of decision making at the school level<sup>1</sup> (The percentage of the public in each country who gave the topic listed a rating of “very important.”)

	United States	Austria	Belgium	Denmark	Finland	France	Netherlands	Portugal	Spain	Sweden	Switzerland	United Kingdom	Topic average
<b>Topic</b>													
Teacher selection and promotion	67	31	39	30	30	59	47	51	20	43	26	49	<b>41</b>
How the school budget is spent	64	32	36	34	36	50	31	55	19	50	22	56	<b>40</b>
How subjects are taught	60	36	41	31	32	56	35	54	19	37	32	49	<b>40</b>
Teachers' salaries and working conditions	57	18	26	12	19	43	24	36	13	17	14	32	<b>33</b>
Amount of time spent teaching each subject	56	27	27	16	23	51	22	49	16	24	21	43	<b>31</b>
What subjects are taught	53	31	22	20	16	34	15	44	13	23	18	39	<b>27</b>
<b>Country Average</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>45</b>	

<sup>1</sup>Topics are listed according to the priorities of the U.S. public.

SOURCE: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Education at a Glance, 1995*.

Figure 27.—Importance of decision making at the school level<sup>1</sup>

Topic	United States	Austria	Belgium	Denmark	Finland	France	Netherlands	Portugal	Spain	Sweden	Switzerland	United Kingdom
Teacher selection and promotion	P	i	i	i	i	I	i	I	i	i	i	i
How the school budget is spent	I	i	i	i	i	I	i	I	i	I	i	I
How subjects are taught	I	i	i	i	i	I	i	I	i	i	i	i
Teachers' salaries and working conditions	I	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i
Amount of time spent teaching each subject	I	i	i	i	i	I	i	i	i	i	i	i
What subjects are taught	I	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i

<sup>1</sup>Topics are listed according to the priorities of the U.S. public.

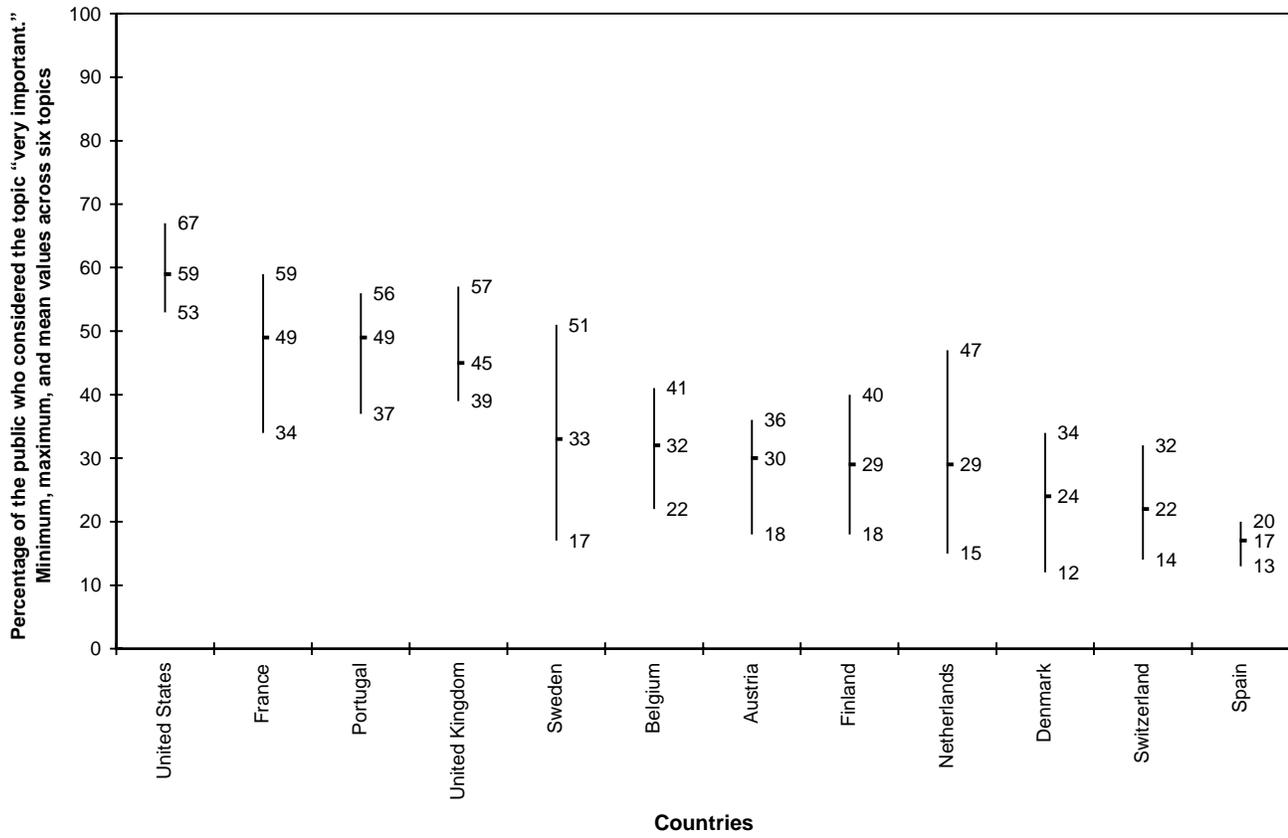
P Indicates that 67 percent or more of the public in this country gave the topic listed a rating of "very important."

I Indicates that 50 to 66 percent of the public in this country gave the topic listed a rating of "very important."

i Indicates that less than 50 percent of the public in this country gave the topic listed a rating of "very important."

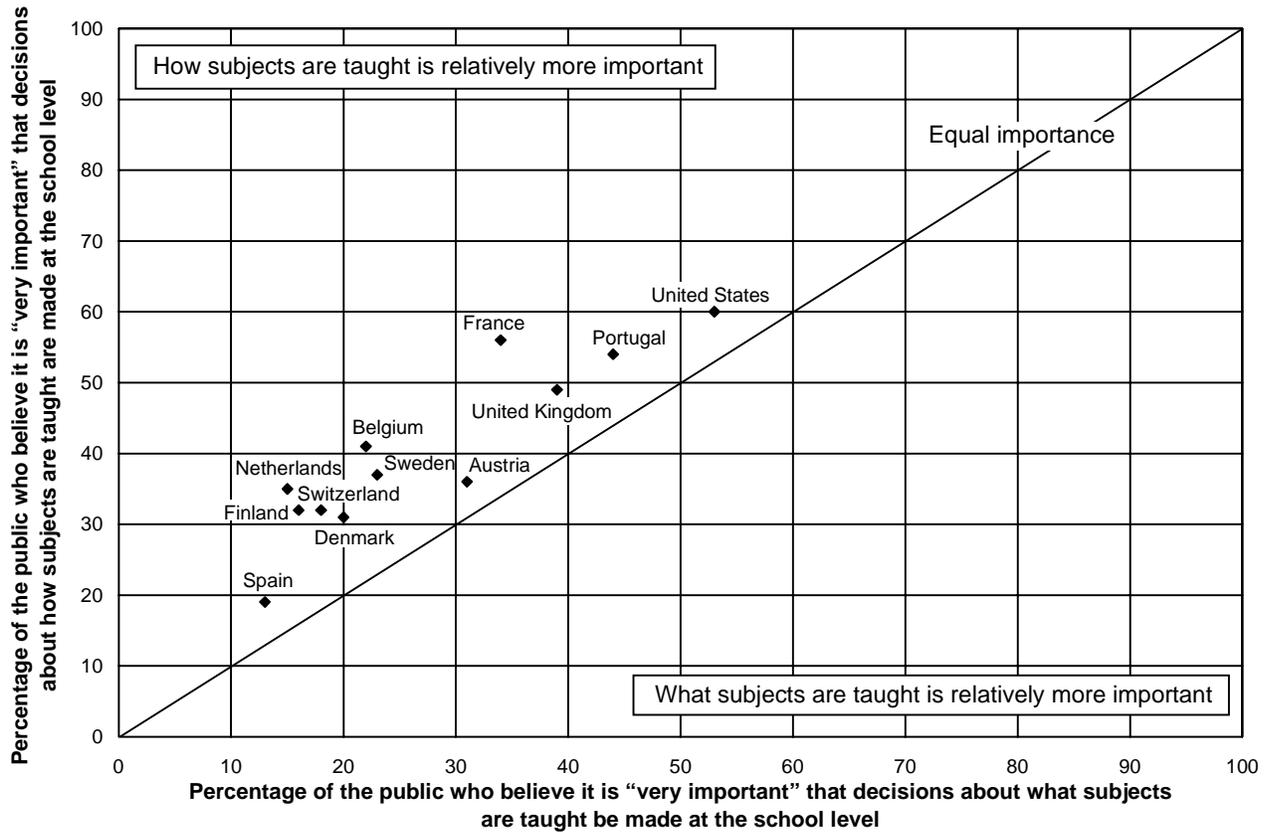
SOURCE: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Education at a Glance, 1995*.

Figure 28.—Variation among countries in the importance of decision making at the school level



SOURCE: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Education at a Glance, 1995.

Figure 29.—Importance of how subjects are taught compared to the importance of what subjects are taught



SOURCE: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Education at a Glance, 1995.

## Conclusion

Perhaps the most surprising results from this survey are the expectations of the public in different OECD countries regarding the importance of the schools' role in the development of students' personal and social qualities. In the United States, for example, three personal and social qualities were rated higher in importance than all subjects except mathematics, native language, and information technology. All eight personal and social qualities were rated higher in importance than foreign languages, the arts, and technical studies. In several countries (i.e., Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, and Portugal) the schools' role in developing seven of the eight personal and social qualities was considered more important than several subjects schools teach, including the sciences, social subjects, education for citizenship, physical education, the arts, and technical studies. Clearly, for the public, it is important for schools to do more than just teach subjects. However, compared with their confidence in teaching of subjects, the public has less confidence that schools can develop personal and social qualities well.

Reflecting this lack of confidence, there is general support from the public for several of the reform efforts under way in many OECD countries. With regard to curriculum development, for instance, the public in most countries view new subjects (e.g., information technology) and a wider range of topics (e.g., education for citizenship) as important as some of the traditional academic subjects. Most OECD countries have given or are giving greater autonomy to schools in three important areas—budgeting, staff selection, and teaching methods.<sup>17</sup> It is perhaps no accident that these are the areas with the most public support for school autonomy.

Public surveys dealing with the condition and character of school education in the United States, sponsored by organizations such as Public Agenda<sup>18</sup> and Phi Delta Kappa,<sup>19</sup> indicate that the U.S. public has several concerns about its public schools. By revealing attitudes toward secondary education in other countries, this survey illustrates that the U.S. public is not alone in its concerns, which include, for example, the lack of confidence that important subjects are taught well and the lack of confidence that schools have a major impact on the development of personal and social qualities in students.

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17. *Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (1995)*. Public Expectations of the Final Stage of Compulsory Education. Paris: Author, p. 47.

18. *Public Agenda (1994)*. First Things First: What Americans Expect from the Public Schools.

19. *Phi Delta Kappan (September 1994)*. The 26th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools.

The U.S. public also holds some views that stand apart from those held in most other countries. As the world becomes increasingly competitive, it is noteworthy that the public in the United States—much more so than the public in many other countries—view mathematics, science, and information technology as of special importance. However, compared with the public in most countries, the U.S. public does not rate the importance of foreign languages very highly. Also, Americans are even more prepared than their European counterparts to give schools autonomy and to place greater importance on strong leadership from the school principal.

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### Technical Note

In table 3 (and related figures, pp. 36–41) and table 4 (and related figures, pp. 44–49) the level of confidence in Sweden appears substantially lower than in other countries. The results tabulated in tables 3 and 4 included those who responded “very confident” or “fairly confident” and excluded those who responded “not very confident,” “not at all confident,” or “not sure either way.” The Swedish representative of Network D has pointed out that the level of confidence in Sweden may appear low because the translation of “not very confident” in the Swedish questionnaire was quite similar to “fairly confident.” Thus, some respondents who were (fairly) confident that subjects are well taught or were (fairly) confident that schools have a major effect on the development of students’ personal and social qualities were excluded from these tabulations. However, the Swedish representative reported that if those who responded “quite confident” are included with those who responded “fairly confident,” the level of confidence is still low.

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## Standard Error Tables

Table 7.—Standard errors for educational importance/priorities in each country<sup>1</sup>  
 (The percentage of the public in each country who gave the subject listed a rating of either  
 “essential” or “very important.”)

Subject	United States	Austria	Belgium	Denmark	Finland	France	Netherlands	Portugal	Spain	Sweden	Switzerland	United Kingdom
Mathematics	0.6	0.7	1.4	1.2	1.0	0.8	1.5	1.0	1.2	1.0	1.2	0.8
English/Native Language	0.8	0.7	1.2	1.1	1.2	0.4	1.0	0.8	1.3	0.8	1.2	1.0
Information Technology	1.0	1.0	1.5	1.5	1.3	1.1	1.4	1.2	1.3	1.5	1.4	1.3
The Sciences	1.0	1.1	1.7	1.5	1.4	1.2	1.6	1.2	1.3	1.5	1.5	1.4
Social Subjects	1.1	1.1	1.7	1.5	1.4	1.2	1.6	1.2	1.3	1.6	1.6	1.4
Education for Citizenship	1.2	1.1	1.7	1.5	1.3	1.2	1.6	1.3	1.3	1.5	1.5	1.4
Physical Education	1.4	1.1	1.7	1.4	1.4	1.3	1.6	1.3	1.3	1.6	1.5	1.4
Foreign Languages	1.4	0.7	1.2	1.2	0.9	0.9	1.7	1.0	1.2	1.1	1.3	1.4
The Arts	1.4	1.2	1.6	1.4	1.3	1.2	1.5	1.4	1.3	1.5	1.6	1.2
Technical Studies	1.3	1.2	1.8	—	1.4	1.3	1.6	1.3	1.3	1.5	1.6	1.4

<sup>1</sup>Subjects are listed according to the priorities of the U.S. public.

—The importance of the subject “Technical Studies” was not asked for in Denmark.

SOURCE: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), “The General Public’s Expectations of, and Confidence in, Education. April 1993.

Table 8.—Standard errors for the importance of qualities or aptitudes in each country<sup>1</sup>  
 (The percentage of the public in each country who gave the quality listed a rating of either  
 “essential” or “very important.”)

Quality	United States	Austria	Belgium	Denmark	Finland	France	Netherlands	Portugal	Spain	Sweden	Switzerland	United Kingdom
Skills/knowledge to get a job	0.7	0.7	1.3	1.3	1.1	0.7	1.3	1.0	1.1	1.1	1.0	0.9
Skills/knowledge to continue studies/training	0.9	0.8	1.5	1.4	1.2	1.0	1.2	1.0	1.2	1.3	1.1	—
Self-confidence	0.9	0.6	1.1	1.0	0.9	0.7	1.0	1.1	1.2	1.0	0.8	0.9
Desire to continue studies/training	1.0	1.0	1.5	1.4	1.3	0.9	1.5	1.1	1.2	1.5	1.4	1.3
Being a good citizen	1.0	1.1	1.4	1.4	1.2	1.0	1.6	1.0	1.2	1.4	1.6	1.1
Lifestyle for good health	1.1	0.9	1.5	1.4	1.2	0.9	1.6	1.0	1.2	1.4	1.3	1.3
Live among people from different backgrounds	1.1	0.9	1.4	1.1	1.0	1.0	1.2	1.1	1.2	1.4	1.0	1.3
Understanding of other countries	1.3	1.1	1.7	1.5	1.4	1.2	1.6	1.3	1.3	1.5	1.4	1.4

<sup>1</sup>Qualities are listed according to the priorities of the U.S. public.

—The importance of the quality “Skills/knowledge to continue studies/training” was not asked for in the United Kingdom.

SOURCE: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *The General Public’s Expectations of, and Confidence in, Education*. April 1993.

Table 9.—Standard errors for confidence that subjects are being taught well<sup>1</sup>  
 (The percentage of the public in each country who gave the subject listed a rating of either  
 “very confident” or “fairly confident.”)

<b>Subject</b>	United States	Austria	Belgium	Denmark	Finland	France	Netherlands	Portugal	Spain	Sweden	Switzerland	United Kingdom
Mathematics	1.3	0.8	1.3	1.1	1.2	1.1	1.5	1.4	1.3	1.6	1.2	1.4
Information Technology	1.3	1.1	1.7	1.4	1.4	1.1	1.6	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.5	1.4
English/Native Language	1.3	0.9	1.3	1.3	1.2	0.8	1.6	1.4	1.3	1.6	1.3	1.4
Social Subjects	1.3	1.0	1.6	1.4	1.3	0.9	1.6	1.4	1.3	1.5	1.4	1.4
Physical Education	1.3	1.1	1.8	1.4	1.4	1.1	1.6	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.4
The Sciences	1.3	1.0	1.4	1.3	1.2	0.9	1.5	1.4	1.3	1.5	1.3	1.4
Technical Studies	1.4	1.2	1.7	—	1.4	1.1	1.6	1.4	1.2	1.3	1.5	1.4
The Arts	1.4	1.1	1.8	1.4	1.4	1.3	1.6	1.4	1.2	1.2	1.5	1.4
Foreign Languages	1.4	1.0	1.5	1.1	1.2	0.9	1.5	1.4	1.3	1.6	1.4	1.4
Education for Citizenship	1.4	1.2	1.7	1.4	1.4	1.2	1.6	1.4	1.3	1.4	1.6	1.4

<sup>1</sup>Subjects are listed according to the priorities of the U.S. public.

—Confidence in the teaching of the subject “Technical Studies” was not asked for in Denmark.

SOURCE: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *The General Public’s Expectations of, and Confidence in, Education*. April 1993.

Table 10.—Standard errors for confidence that schools have a major effect on the development of certain qualities<sup>1</sup> (The percentage of the public in each country who gave the quality listed a rating of either “very confident” or “fairly confident.”)

Quality	United States	Austria	Belgium	Denmark	Finland	France	Netherlands	Portugal	Spain	Sweden	Switzerland	United Kingdom
Skills/knowledge to continue studies/training	1.3	1.1	1.7	1.2	1.3	1.2	1.5	1.4	1.3	1.4	1.4	—
Desire to continue studies/training	1.3	1.1	1.6	1.3	1.4	1.2	1.6	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.4	1.4
Skills/knowledge to get a job	1.3	1.2	1.7	1.4	1.4	1.3	1.6	1.4	1.2	1.2	1.5	1.4
Lifestyle for good health	1.4	1.2	1.8	1.5	1.4	1.3	1.5	1.4	1.2	1.1	1.6	1.4
Being a good citizen	1.4	1.2	1.8	1.4	1.4	1.3	1.6	1.4	1.3	1.2	1.6	1.4
Understanding of other countries	1.4	1.2	1.7	1.4	1.4	1.2	1.6	1.4	1.2	1.0	1.6	1.4
Self-confidence	1.4	1.2	1.8	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.6	1.4	1.2	0.9	1.6	1.4
Live among people from different backgrounds	1.4	1.2	1.8	1.4	1.4	1.2	1.6	1.4	1.3	1.0	1.6	1.4

<sup>1</sup>Qualities are listed according to the priorities of the U.S. public.

—Confidence in the quality “Skills/knowledge to continue studies/training” was not asked for in the United Kingdom.

SOURCE: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *The General Public’s Expectations of, and Confidence in, Education*. April 1993.

Table 11.—Standard errors for priorities in school practices in each country<sup>1</sup>  
 (The percentage of the public in each country who gave the practice listed a rating of either  
 “essential” or “very important.”)

Practice	United States	Austria	Belgium	Denmark	Finland	France	Netherlands	Portugal	Spain	Sweden	Switzerland	United Kingdom
Keeping parents well informed and involved	0.6	0.8	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.1	1.2	1.0	1.2	1.3	1.0	1.0
Maintaining discipline	0.7	1.1	1.4	1.5	0.9	0.8	1.5	1.2	1.3	1.3	1.5	0.9
Helping with learning difficulties	0.7	0.7	1.0	1.2	0.9	0.6	0.9	1.0	1.2	1.0	0.9	0.8
Strong leadership from principal	1.0	1.2	1.6	1.5	1.4	1.0	1.6	1.3	1.3	1.5	1.6	1.2
Careers advice and guidance	1.0	0.7	1.5	1.4	1.2	0.6	1.3	1.1	1.2	1.4	1.2	1.0
Wide range of subjects taught	1.1	1.1	1.6	1.5	1.2	1.2	1.5	1.4	1.3	1.6	1.4	1.3
Regular homework	1.2	1.2	1.7	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.6	1.3	1.3	1.6	1.6	1.4

<sup>1</sup>Practices are listed according to the priorities of the U.S. public.

SOURCE: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *The General Public's Expectations of, and Confidence in, Education*. April 1993.

Table 12.—Standard errors for importance of decision making at the school level<sup>1</sup>  
 (The percentage of the public in each country who gave the topic listed a rating of  
 “very important.”)

Topic	United States	Austria	Belgium	Denmark	Finland	France	Netherlands	Portugal	Spain	Sweden	Switzerland	United Kingdom
Teacher selection and promotion	1.3	1.1	1.7	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.6	1.4	1.1	1.6	1.4	1.4
How the school budget is spent	1.3	1.1	1.7	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.5	1.4	1.0	1.6	1.3	1.4
How subjects are taught	1.4	1.1	1.7	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.6	1.4	1.0	1.5	1.5	1.4
Teachers' salaries and working conditions	1.4	0.9	1.5	1.0	1.1	1.3	1.4	1.3	0.9	1.2	1.1	1.3
Amount of time spent teaching each subject	1.4	1.1	1.6	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.4	1.0	1.3	1.3	1.4
What subjects are taught	1.4	1.1	1.5	1.2	1.0	1.2	1.2	1.4	0.9	1.3	1.2	1.4

<sup>1</sup>Topics are listed according to the priorities of the U.S. public.

SOURCE: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *The General Public's Expectations of, and Confidence in, Education*. April 1993.